

FLIGHT MH17, UKRAINE AND THE NEW COLD WAR

Prism of disaster



KEES VAN DER PIJL

Flight MH17, Ukraine and the new Cold War



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Geopolitical Economy

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Preface

This book took shape in the campaign for the Dutch referendum on the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine on 6 April 2016. Our group, OorlogIsGeenOplossing.nl (War is No Solution), jointly with the Centre for Geopolitics in Utrecht, supported the NO side (which eventually won by two-thirds), whilst trying to raise the quality of the debate beyond the dominant pro and anti-EU positions. During the campaign, for which I travelled to various towns and cities as a speaker, I became more and more convinced that the right of the Dutch electorate to be properly informed of the ins and outs of Ukraine's EU Association was being violated on every count by the government and the mainstream media. In the highly charged atmosphere caused by the downing of Flight MH17 two years earlier, where most of the victims were from the Netherlands, the unrelenting demonisation of the figure of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, further stifled proper debate.

To prepare myself for the speaking engagements, I wrote a background document with a more balanced view. How could one fail to see that the advance of NATO and the EU into the former Soviet bloc and even the territory of the former USSR itself, with the undisguised attempts to get post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine to side with the West against Russia, would at some point provoke a strong reaction from Moscow? How could one fail to see the jeopardy in which this put the fragile statehood of these post-Soviet entities given their ethnic fault-lines, inevitable after the Soviet Union with its more than 190 different nations, nationalities and national groups, broke up into 15 new republics?

Providing an account that would acknowledge these factors as well as revisit the downing of Flight MH17, which was the focal point of daily Putin-bashing in the Dutch media, thus seemed a worthwhile effort. I had also written a series of blogs titled 'Will MH17 be our 9/11?' for the OorlogIsGeenOplossing website (in Dutch and English), which strengthened my conviction that a book on the topic would need a much more comprehensive engagement with the historical context. After all, there was already a balanced investigation of the downing as such, in Dutch, by the journalist, Joost Niemöller, which failed to make an impact because of a watertight media boycott. Also, looking at the MH17 disaster in isolation would get me entangled in matters that necessarily remain obscure, whereas starting from the historical situation and its evolution in recent

decades would allow me to leave the 'conspiratorial' aspects where they belong – in the realm of unsolved mystery.

The opening event of our EU/Ukraine referendum campaign on 20 March 2016 in the Amsterdam debating centre, *De Balie*, only strengthened my resolve in this respect. Two of the most outstanding international specialists on the issue, Nicolai Petro of Rhode Island University and Richard Sakwa of Kent University; the Dutch journalist, Stan van Houcke; Andrej Hunko, Ukraine committee chair in the German Bundestag for the Left Party, and Tiny Kox of the Socialist Party in the Netherlands, all made important contributions, whilst Chris de Ploeg presented the Dutch translation of his seminal book on Ukraine, on which I rely extensively in the pages that follow. Yet although we had announced it by a press release well in advance, advertising these speakers, the meeting went unreported except for the videos on the *OorlogsGeenOplossing* website.

The present book, which Professors Petro and Sakwa both encouraged me to write, is the result of my effort since then. It begins with the historical context and then, step by step, moves closer to the actual event, which serves as the focal point. Though many of its key aspects remain shrouded in obscurity, by listing every possible known detail, even if its immediate relevance cannot be fully established at this point, we can get as good a picture as current evidence permits.

On 26 October 2016 I presented some preliminary theses at a meeting with members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Dutch Second Chamber, to which we had been invited by Harry van Bommel of the Socialist Party. The one other MP who has tenaciously challenged the Dutch government's handling of the crisis, Pieter Omtzigt (Christian Democrat), was also present. Our plea that the government not seize on the highly questionable Joint Investigation Team (JIT) investigation results to further raise tensions with Russia largely failed. However, after the Dutch public broadcasting corporation, NOS, reported the meeting, important new contacts came forward. These first of all included the painter and energy policy activist, Ms Babette Ubink van der Spek, who provided crucial information on the plane's cargo and the role of Russian energy links with the EU; as well as a group of MH17 bloggers, whose familiarity with the details of the downing greatly helped me to avoid becoming trapped in the propaganda war. I thank Hector Reban, Herman Rozema and Max van der Werff, who also brought me in contact with Roger Annis of *NewColdWar.org*, a Canadian website. Roger too made many important comments, both on the substance and the presentation of the book.

Joël van Dooren has been a critical partner in the enterprise and supplied key materials. So did Hans van Zon, who also commented on an earlier version of the manuscript. Bas van Beek of the Platform for Authentic Journalism provided me with Dutch government documents pertaining to the EU Association Agreement, obtained under the Dutch Freedom of Information Act (WOB). Others whose help I am grateful for include Karel van Broekhoven, Ewout van der Hoog, Willy Klinkenberg, Henk Overbeek, Jan Schaake, Cees Wiebes, Yuliya Yurchenko and several correspondents in Ukraine who have requested anonymity to avoid persecution in what has become a very dangerous environment also outside the combat zones in the civil war.

For the present version I am indebted to Radhika Desai, who went through the entire manuscript line by line and made numerous suggestions for improvement. Her profound understanding of the argument, combined with the theoretical acumen

demonstrated in her own work, in no small way contributed to the final format of the book. Although I did not change any substantive conclusions, which remain identical to the German edition with PapyRossa in Cologne and the Portuguese translation with Fino Traço in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), in terms of presentation this is almost a second edition. For the efficient production of the book I thank Rob Byron at MUP and the team at Out of House Publishing.

Since the manuscript was finalised, no developments have occurred that would have made substantive changes necessary. The Joint Investigation Team, entrusted with the criminal prosecution of the downing of Flight MH17, unexpectedly held a press conference in the Netherlands on 24 May 2018, just as this book was going to press. On that basis the Dutch and Australian governments formally declared Russia responsible, although the information the JIT produced about a Russian Buk brigade, based on a 'Bellingcat' investigation (this book, p. 139), had been dismissed as unfit for evidence two years earlier (p. 143) and no court case had even begun. The fact that the JIT, almost four years after the event, again called on witnesses to come forward, does not suggest that such a trial will be held any time soon.

None of the above can be held accountable for the conclusions that I draw, or for factual errors that have remained, for which I alone am responsible.

Amsterdam, June 2018

Introduction: A civilian airliner in the firing line

On 17 July 2014, Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 was brought down over eastern Ukraine, a few minutes before it would have crossed into Russian airspace on its journey from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. The incident, killing all on board, occurred six months after Ukrainian ultra-nationalists had seized power in Kiev (Kyiv) with Western support, triggering the secession of Crimea and a Russian-Ukrainian insurgency in the Donbass (Donetsk and Lugansk provinces or *oblasts*, see Figure 0.1).

In this book I analyse the MH17 catastrophe as a prism that refracts the broader historical context in which it occurred, arraying its distinct strands and their interrelations in a rare moment of clarity. These strands included the capsizing of the European and world balance of power after the collapse of the USSR; the resurrection by the Putin leadership in Moscow of a Russian state and economy strong enough to resist Western direction; the Russia–EU energy connection; the civil war in Ukraine that followed the seizure of power of February 2014, and the attempt to turn Russia into an enemy again, legitimising NATO and EU forward pressure and the new Cold War. There is no way that the disaster can be understood as an isolated incident, a matter of identifying the immediate causes of the crash, or who gave the order to shoot it down if it was not an accident. The analysis must cast its net much wider, if only because many conclusive details are either missing or shrouded by the fog of the propaganda war that broke out immediately afterwards. Certainly an investigation of the catastrophe cannot remain confined to the forensics or rely on phone taps provided by the intelligence service of a regime in Kiev which, by any standard, should be considered a potential perpetrator.

To begin with, the downing was, as one researcher phrases it, a *systems* event, involving a missile crew targeting Malaysia's Boeing 777-200, intentionally or by mistake, as well as 'policy decisions, including Ukraine's decision to allow passenger aircraft to overfly a war-zone and Malaysia Airlines' decision to take advantage of the Ukrainian authorities' reckless permission [to do so]'. Thus, 'the commercial aviation network space (governments, regulatory authorities, airlines, shareholders, customers, etc.) incubated the MH17 disaster until, on 17 July, 2014, a missile crew added [a] "trigger event"'.¹

In its turn, this trigger event was the likely result of conflict, which generates perceptions and actions across a further range of parties, each of which may contribute to activate the 'trigger'. This was the case, for instance, in September 1983, when a Korean Air Lines Boeing 747 on a flight from Anchorage to Seoul was shot down by



0.1 Ukraine in 2014: oblasts and provincial capitals; neighbouring countries.

a Soviet Su-15 fighter. The Boeing had strayed into Soviet airspace for several hundred kilometres, around the time an American military reconnaissance plane was also aloft, possibly to test radars of some of the Soviet Union's most sensitive military installations on Sakhalin Island and the Kamchatka peninsula. When it did not respond to repeated signals to return to its normal flight path, the Korean Air Lines plane was shot down. This too was no mere isolated 'disaster', but part of a larger picture, which included then-President Ronald Reagan's warlike rhetoric about the 'Evil Empire', doubts among the Soviet leadership about the president's sanity, the deployment of Pershing II missiles to Europe, and the imminence of a major NATO exercise, 'Able Archer'. All this produced a real war scare in the Kremlin. This filtered down to area commanders who made the fatal decision for the fighter plane to fire, to which Moscow could only respond with a clumsy denial.²

The conflict in Ukraine and the downing of Flight MH17 are also related to the challenge posed to Western global governance by a tentative, initially involuntary, bloc of large contender states led by China and Russia. Russia is at the heart of a Eurasian alternative to the neoliberal EU, whilst China is the obvious centre of the 'BRICS' countries (the others being Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa). The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, established in 2001, is another of the bloc's supporting structures. In the days immediately preceding the downing, the BRICS heads of state, hosted by the Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff (since removed by a soft coup staged in May 2016), signed the statute establishing a New Development Bank as a direct challenge to the US and Western-dominated World Bank and IMF. Still in Brazil before flying back to Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin on the fringes of the football world cup finals also

agreed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to pursue a comprehensive Land for Gas deal. Its tentative provisions included normalising the status of Crimea in exchange for a massive economic rehabilitation plan and a gas price rebate for Ukraine.³

Russia's energy resources were key to this deal and, more broadly, to forging a symbiosis with the EU, in particular with Germany and Italy. After the Nord Stream pipeline across the Baltic, agreed in 2005 and linking Russia and Germany directly, a South Stream counterpart across the Black Sea was contracted with ENI of Italy in 2007, to be extended through a grid into southern Europe as far as Austria, with German companies involved too. This sort of German–Russian rapprochement goes back to the days of Bismarck and around the turn of the twentieth century gave rise to the notion that Anglo-America, the heartland of liberal capitalism and the potentially excluded party from such a rapprochement, should consider its prevention the priority of its European diplomacy. For, by the sheer size of the Eurasian land mass (for which the term 'heartland' was coined originally), not to mention the formidable combination that European industry and Russian resources could constitute, unity among the Eurasian states had long appeared threatening to the supremacy of the Anglophone West.⁴

Energy diplomacy likely explains the sanctions the United States imposed on Russia following the coup in Kiev, and it may explain why Washington stepped up the level of punitive measures so drastically on 16 July, one day before MH17 was brought down, while the BRICS leaders were still in Brazil and Putin and Merkel agreed to work on a solution to the crisis. However, these sanctions were still to be underwritten by an EU summit and expectations were that this was not going to be smooth sailing, because several EU states balked at the prospect of a further disruption of their gas supply, agricultural exports and other economic links with Russia. These hesitations were only overcome after the catastrophe occurred the next day. The Land for Gas negotiations, too, were immediately terminated. South Stream, already being opposed for violations of EU competition rules, was finally abandoned on 1 December 2014. It was replaced by a tentative agreement with Turkey on an alternative route, but this too was disrupted by the shooting down of a Russian jet over Syria by an F-16 from the NATO air base at Incirlik in southern Turkey in November 2015. It was only revived after the failed coup against the Erdoğan government in July 2016.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are in the midst of a struggle of world-historical proportions between two conflicting social orders: the neoliberal capitalism of the West, locked in a crisis caused by speculative finance, yet still hostage to it, versus a state-directed capitalism. Fought out in Russia's 'Near Abroad', in the Middle East, in the South China Sea, and elsewhere, this struggle, like all modern wars, tests 'the viability of the political, cultural, and economic institutions of various adversaries, and their outcome has with time reflected these domains at least as much as the balance of military power'.⁵ In the stand-off over MH17, for instance, the West's superiority over Russia in news management is obvious.

This brings us to another issue of method. The operation of large-scale political-economic processes always involves, ultimately, class formation and struggle. Their analysis therefore requires the identification of strategic class agency.⁶ Since not all strategic action is a matter of overt, transparent procedure, class analysis must necessarily encompass what Peter Dale Scott calls 'deep political analysis'. A deep political system or

process, he writes, is one 'which habitually resorts to decision-making and enforcement procedures outside as well as inside those publicly sanctioned by law and society'. Deep political analysis, because its object is shrouded in secrecy, 'enlarges traditional structuralist analysis to include indeterminacies analogous to those which are studied in chaos theory'.⁷

Too often, consideration of the political netherworld is dismissed as conspiracy theory. But the fact that there is an abundant supply of simplistic conspiracy theories cannot be an excuse for not investigating the role of provocation and manipulation by criminal or deep state agencies, certainly not after recent revelations about such actions by Snowden, Assange and Manning.⁸ Whether we are looking at the new Cold War with Russia, the contest between the West and the BRICS contender bloc, the Ukrainian civil war, or the downing of flight MH17 itself, political and economic forces involved were often acting through 'deep' channels not acknowledged by the authorities exercising legitimate state power, and certainly not shared with the audiences of the mainstream media.⁹ Once again, this rules out a straightforward 'whodunit'.

Our task, then, will be to connect the macro-context of the heartland–contender structure of the global political economy with the micro-structure of the actual downing of Flight MH17 in the Ukrainian civil war. This complex set of connections is not only inevitably obscured by deep politics, it is also plagued by contradictions, misperceptions and failure. After all, as the theorist of war, Carl von Clausewitz, said, 'Man with his incomplete organization is always below the line of absolute perfection, and thus these deficiencies, having an influence on both sides, become a modifying principle'.¹⁰ How human imperfection modified, in the final instance, the global contest between a crisis-ridden West and a resurgent 'rest', tragically adding the MH17 disaster to the carnage already in progress in Ukraine, will also concern us in this study.

The book is set up as follows. In [Chapter 1](#), I argue that in the current new Cold War with Putin's Russia, the West operates from a perspective inspired by the mentality of extreme risk-taking that stems from the dominant role of finance in contemporary capitalism. In fact, the post-Soviet space became a testing ground for predatory finance and for the uncompromising authoritarianism that we also see emerging in the West. The financial crisis of 2008 coincided with the first test of strength with Russia, when the Bush Jr. administration encouraged Georgia to try and recapture its breakaway province of South Ossetia by force. The European Union was simultaneously trying to commit former Soviet republics to an Eastern Partnership and EU Association, a barely disguised extension of the Euro-Atlantic bloc into the former Soviet space.

In [Chapter 2](#) my argument is that the dividing lines established by the enlargement of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1922 and the addition of Crimea to it in 1954, remained operational after independence. The Russian-Ukrainian population in the south and east favours close ties with Russia; the Ukrainian population in the westernmost parts has a history of resistance to it. This fragile unity is best accommodated by federalism, and the fraction of the oligarchy of post-Soviet Ukraine that slowly gained the upper hand in the struggles over the control of gas distribution and transit from Russia to the EU and Turkey, was of federalist stripe. By 2004, society grew restive over the endless plunder amid mass poverty and destitution. In the 'Orange Revolution' of that year, protest over

election fraud was exploited by lesser oligarchs to try and wrest back control over gas and other economic assets from the billionaires associated with federalism.

The decision of President Yanukovich not to sign the EU Association Agreement in November 2013 sparked another round of demonstrations. For Ukraine, the agreement would have had grave economic consequences, but in the eyes of many, especially the urban middle classes, Yanukovich's readiness to accept a Russian counteroffer was a missed chance to stop the plunder by the oligarchy, by then including the president's family. As I argue in [Chapter 3](#), the armed seizure of power on 22 February 2014 occurred on the back of these demonstrations and put state power in the hands of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and actual fascists. The EU, which had mediated between the president and the opposition, allowed itself to be unceremoniously sidelined by the United States, which was not a party to the agreement. Instead US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and other Western diplomats negotiated with the co-founder of the fascist party of independent Ukraine and commander of its militia, Andriy Parubiy, on the modalities of removing Yanukovich by force. Parubiy led the armed groups in the Maidan uprising (named after the square in central Kiev from where the largest of the anti-government assaults were staged during the previous months) and in that capacity was responsible for the shooting of demonstrators and riot police that in the West is routinely attributed to the authorities. The coup provoked the secession of Crimea and the uprising in the Donbass. Importantly, Parubiy, put in command of all military and intelligence operations as Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) after the coup, played a crucial role in the 'Anti Terrorist Operation' to bring the rebellious provinces to heel – until three weeks after the MH17 disaster.

The West committed itself to the coup regime in Kiev right away and actually identified who should lead the new government (as revealed in the notorious, leaked phone call between US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Ambassador Pyatt). As we see in [Chapter 4](#), the hacked e-mails of NATO commander General Breedlove reveal that US advisers were directly involved in getting the coup government in Kiev to respond with force to the uprising in the eastern provinces, on the express supposition that this was the time and place to confront Russia and China. My argument is that time and again, the forces of compromise, nationally and internationally, were cut off by a distinct war party made up of NATO hardliners and Ukrainian ultras. Whether the downing of MH17 was a conscious move in this context cannot be established, but there is no doubt that the disaster swept aside all remaining hesitations in Europe to go along with the new round of sanctions on Russia imposed by the United States the day before.

From the start, the civil war had been portrayed in the West against the background of an alleged Russian intervention in Ukraine and the MH17 catastrophe was seamlessly woven into this narrative. So, when the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, solemnly stated, three days after the event, 'We saw the take-off. We saw the trajectory, we saw the hit. We saw this aeroplane disappear from the radar screens. So there is really no mystery about where it came from and where these weapons have come from', there was little doubt he was speaking of Russia.¹¹ In fact, no evidence has been provided by the United States and NATO, or the EU following their lead, to substantiate this claim. It remains an insinuation. In [Chapter 5](#), I review the results of the official investigations into

the MH17 disaster; which Ukraine delegated to the Netherlands. Both were profoundly compromised by granting the coup government in Kiev a veto over any outcomes, a novelty in the history of aviation disaster investigation that was considered shameful even in Ukraine.

The immunity from criminal prosecution was granted on 7 August, the day Andriy Parubiy stepped down as NSDC secretary. Since NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen paid a lightning visit to Kiev that very day, with tanks patrolling the streets, I ask the question whether Rasmussen had come to express support for President Petro Poroshenko and the immunity was the price to ward off another coup. Eventually the criminal investigation by a Joint Investigation Team (JIT), whose progress report was delivered in September 2016, confirmed the conclusion of the Dutch Safety Board (DSB, in Dutch, OVV), that the plane had been downed by a Buk (SA-11) surface-to-air missile hit. The JIT added that the Buk unit had been transported from Russia, fired a missile from rebel-held territory, and then was transported back. This had been the original scenario floated by the minister of the interior of the coup government in Kiev, Arsen Avakov, and his spokesman, Anton Gerashchenko, right after the downing, in order to inculpate Moscow.

Russia's Eurasian Union project has been set back seriously by the de-linking of the Ukrainian economy from the former Soviet division of labour; as I document in the remaining part of [Chapter 5](#). Hence from the Russian angle, the MH17 disaster is only one element in a much broader picture covering the coup and the civil war; its more than ten thousand dead and more than a million refugees. Nevertheless, through the entire process Moscow, too, has adopted a strange posture that does not inspire confidence. Excluded from both investigations, it has not come up with compelling evidence exculpating itself and/or the insurgents, either. After a press conference on 21 July, at which the military challenged the accusations being made against it, the Russian authorities criticised the Dutch-led investigations mostly through private parties, notably the company that produces the Buk system, Almaz-Antey. Besides reticence about exposing the true reach and capacity of its satellite and radar intelligence, the explanation for these oblique hints and last-minute revelations can only be that for Moscow there are other priorities in Ukraine and even in its relations with the West than revealing the truth about MH17 – just as for the United States and NATO, which have consistently failed to back up any of their claims concerning Russian or insurgent responsibility, geopolitical considerations come first.

Notes

- 1 Simon A. Bennett, 'Framing the MH17 disaster: more heat than light?' *International Journal of Aviation, Aeronautics, and Aerospace*, 2 (4) 2015, Scholarly Commons (online), p. 10. All online sources are posted with the full web address, with the complete bibliography, at <https://sussex.academia.edu/KeesVanderPijl> and <https://der-abschuss.blogspot.nl/>.
- 2 Mel Goodman, 'The "war scare" in the Kremlin, revisited: is history repeating itself?' *CounterPunch*, 27 October 2015 (online); Bennett, 'Framing the MH17 disaster', p. 11.
- 3 Margareta Pagano, 'Land for gas: Merkel and Putin discussed secret deal could end Ukraine crisis'. *Independent*, 31 July 2014 (online); Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, pp. 171–2.

- 4 Halford J. Mackinder, 'The geographical pivot of history'. *The Geographical Journal*, 23 (4) 1904, pp. 421–37; see my *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq*. London: Pluto and New Delhi: Sage Vistaar, 2006, ch. 7.
- 5 Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War: Politics, Conflicts, and Society Since 1914*. New York: The New Press, 1994, p. xvii.
- 6 I have developed this notably in *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class*. London: Verso, 1984, new edn, 2012; *Transnational Classes and International Relations*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- 7 Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* [with a new preface]. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996 [1993], pp. xiii, xiv and xi–xii, respectively.
- 8 Robert Cox, 'The covert world'. In *The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilization* [with M.G. Schechter]. London: Routledge, 2002, and Eric Wilson, ed., *Government of the Shadows: Parapolitics and Criminal Sovereignty*. London: Pluto, 2009.
- 9 Karel van Wolferen, 'The Ukraine, corrupted journalism, and the Atlanticist faith'. *Unz Review*, 14 August 2014 (online).
- 10 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* [ed. and intro A. Rapoport; trans. J.J. Graham]. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1832], p. 106.
- 11 Cited in Pieter Omtzigt, 'MH17 en de radar'. *Jalta.nl*, 23 October 2015 (online).

The global gamble of a new Cold War

Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 was brought down amid a new Cold War between the Atlantic bloc and Russia, and greatly exacerbated it. So understanding the tragedy also requires us to contextualise it in this wider confrontation pitting the liberal West against a loose contender bloc composed of several relatively disjointed parts. These include the Russian-inspired Eurasian Union and at a further remove, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, together comprising half the world's population) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). MH17 was shot down at the very moment the one key figure prominent in all three entities, Russian President Vladimir Putin, was flying back from Fortaleza, Brazil, where he and the other five BRICS leaders signed the charter of a New Development Bank. Whether this is an indirect connection or a more sinister coincidence will be discussed later in this book.

Putin came to power in 2000 because Russians were no longer willing to comply with the Western political-economic policy preferences that wreaked destruction on their economy and society in the 1990s. Washington watched with growing dismay as, over two terms in office and assisted by steeply rising oil and gas prices, Putin worked to restore a strong state in Russia, expressed Eurasian aspirations and drew closer to the BRICS bloc.¹ In 2008, the West therefore embarked on a more aggressive penetration into the post-Soviet space to tighten its encirclement of Russia, both through NATO (at the alliance's Bucharest summit in April) and the EU, which began negotiations on an Eastern Partnership with a number of post-Soviet republics in May. Then, in August, came the ill-fated Georgian invasion of South Ossetia, by which the Saakashvili government, armed and encouraged by the United States and Israel, hoped to recapture its breakaway province by force. All this took place amidst a momentous financial crisis with its epicentres in Wall Street and Frankfurt to which transnational capital and governments responded by raising the stakes for a new round in what the late Peter Gowan has called 'the global gamble'.² This has opened up an epoch of unprecedented political and economic instability, evoking frequent comparisons with the prelude to the First World War.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the period leading up to the crisis of 2008 because, to understand the nature of the risks and the mindset with which they are being approached from the West properly, we must distinguish between three clear phases of the so-called Cold War. In its current phase, Ukraine has turned into a key sector of

the frontline, along with the conflict in Syria, yet more dangerous because of its close proximity to Russia.³

Cold Wars and capitalist class formation

Apart from its financial ravages, the crisis of 2008 also upset the hegemony of the liberal, English-speaking West. Hegemony is not just leadership; it is the form of class rule that relies on consensus, rather than coercion. This consensus is *active* among the groups that make up the historic bloc of forces united by their concept of control, which provides them with their unwritten programme and 'common sense'.⁴ It is *passive* for the excluded groups, who are unable to alter it and/or conceive of the world in different terms. Even the most comprehensive hegemony, however, is protected by what Gramsci calls the 'armour of coercion'.⁵

The armour of coercion protecting the liberal capitalist, or Lockean, heartland (after its seventeenth-century ideologue, John Locke) was first provided by Britain, and after an interregnum in the 1930s, by the United States. They combined the task of imposing market discipline and policing it. Today this entire constellation, expanded to include, albeit precariously, the European Union, has become brittle, with its consensual aspects evaporating and the coercive armour of the *Pax Americana* laid bare, as violence is proliferating across the globe.⁶

Historically, only a limited number of states and social formations have been able to hold their own against this liberal pre-eminence. They are what I call *contender states*. Power in a contender state is typically held by a *state class*, into which the propertied ruling class (to the extent it exists at all), various fractions of the managerial and governing cadre, and those wielding military power are condensed. In contrast, the Atlantic ruling class reproduces itself at arm's length from the state, wielding its influence on the basis of a hegemony that is social first. The state socialism of the Soviet Union was the ultimate historical form of a contender state. Whether the Chinese state class, which formed under comparable auspices, can still be confined to the contender role, is an open question, because it would seem today as if the entire heartland/contender structure is unravelling, along with the economic infrastructure of globalising capital.

The West, then, is slowly being dislodged from its commanding position in the global political economy and is losing its inner cohesion in the process. Its rivals may have converted to capitalism, but they refuse to bow to Western pre-eminence and global governance. As a result they are contenders almost against their own preferences. This certainly holds for Putin's Russia. Hence the inadvertent, and to some extent incoherent, formations such as the Eurasian Union, the BRICS and the SCO.

Now, if we speak of a new Cold War in connection with the conflict in/over Ukraine, it is essential to establish *which* Cold War we are comparing it with. 'Cold War' refers to the West's attempt to contain and then roll back the gains made by Soviet state socialism in the fight against Nazi Germany and yet avoid a 'hot war' (in Europe, if not in the imperialist periphery), given the risks of a full-scale nuclear conflict. I will distinguish three Cold Wars, through which the United States persistently sought to gain the upper hand, until in 2008, crisis dishevelled the triumphant West and the 'unipolar moment passed'.⁷ Each Cold War was also part of a distinct phase in capitalist development and

a particular pattern of transnational class formation, in which one fraction of capital (productive, money or commercial capital) led the way.

The first Cold War and class compromise in production

The first Cold War began after the Second World War and ended in the late 1960s, early 1970s. During this period the West was forced into a broad set of *compromises* – with organised labour; with aspirant colonial elites pushing for decolonisation, and also, paradoxically, with Soviet-style state socialism. Its concept of control went back to the 1930s, when the US economy acquired its 'Fordist' format, featuring collective bargaining between peak employer and union organisations over the distribution of productivity increases in mass production. The Five-Year Plans for industrialisation in the USSR were similar, although the unions' role was confiscated by the Soviet state class.⁸ When the Yalta Agreement of February 1945 divided Europe into spheres of influence between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, American Fordism and Stalinist mass production – and the particular configuration of class forces of each – were generalised in their respective spheres and each agreed not to interfere in the other's internal affairs.

Since, given the balance of forces in the post-war period, the 'sovereignty' of capital *and* labour, and in international relations, of the two camps confronting each other had to be respected, the West's liberalism was a *corporate* liberalism.⁹ Liberalism is the spontaneous ideology of capital. Its political aspect, individual freedom, is the primary reference in the Anglophone West, but its essence is the principle of formal equivalence. This allows liberalism to conceal exploitation as equal exchange between individuals.¹⁰ However, the degree to which market discipline penetrates societies varies. From the 1940s, corporations, organised labour, states and blocs were all entitled to operate *internally* on their own principles, liberal or otherwise. Disciplining the entities to which this sovereignty was granted was a crucial component of the Cold War. Capital in the Great Depression already had its financial wings clipped by the Roosevelt administration in the United States; labour was disciplined too, first by the war economy and then by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1946 and the communist witch-hunt waged by the 'deep state' in the form of McCarthyism.¹¹

Capital and the West were in a relatively weak position after the Depression and two world wars. If what Wolfgang Streeck calls the 'social licence' of capitalism was to be renewed and a spillback to fascism, or a slippage into a Soviet-type planned economy, avoided, concessions were inevitable.¹² In the process of decolonisation of the main European empires one may discern the same phase of contested delineations (revolution, repression, war) defining the eventual compromise. For as Radhika Desai writes in connection with the idea that sovereign equality and non-intervention were mere pretences, they were 'necessary pretences because imperialisms were on the defensive'.¹³

Fordism coincided with a stable partition of Europe in East and West and with the more fragile compromises with state classes in the Third World. Here, in the absence of a 'Yalta', the United States inherited the colonial wars of European powers unwilling to grant a licence of sovereign equality to claimants too far to the left. However, US failure to hold the line in Vietnam only further weakened the West, bolstering antagonistic

forces at home and abroad. Indeed, as we can see today, the fact that the Cold War mutated into détente on the East–West axis by the early 1970s and the West agreed to negotiations with the Third World on a New International Economic Order, brought the underlying compromises of corporate liberalism to the surface. The uncoupling of the US dollar from gold in 1971 and the inflation it engendered even served to prolong the compromises on the three dimensions (with labour, with the Soviet bloc and with the Third World) for another decade by allowing the ruling classes to cover what Streeck calls, by reference to Jürgen Habermas, the *legitimation deficit*, or in Gramscian terms, the loss of hegemony.¹⁴

The second Cold War and the shift to global finance

The second Cold War was of a completely different stripe. Effectively it sought to *suspend the sovereignties granted to the USSR and its bloc, to the Third World, and to organised labour*. This suspension was part of a new concept of control, neoliberalism. By radically shifting from corporate to neo-liberalism the West sought to establish the comprehensive sovereignty of capital, as historically developed in the English-speaking, Lockean heartland. As domestic industrial profitability eroded, corporate liberal capitalism proved unable to simultaneously continue capital accumulation and face down the forces resisting it: 'The growth slowdown since the 1970s, whether we call it the crisis of Fordism or the end of the Long Boom, was a more profound crisis of capitalism than hitherto appreciated.'¹⁵

Capital now turned to imposing the market logic of formal equivalence also on hitherto sovereign spaces, forcing open nationally protected economies and labour markets where possible. Thus began a restructuring of production away from the arenas of collective bargaining to new zones, often by privatising national industry or other forms of dispossession, both within and outside the West. Given the resistance – from classes and countries – that this strategy was bound to encounter, class rule in the weaker links of the capitalist system resorted to often murderous counterrevolution, both in large Third World states, from Brazil and Indonesia to Chile and Argentina, and in western Europe, in Greece and Turkey. The NATO strategy of tension in Italy in this respect occupies a place of its own. As instances documenting the lengths to which the West and transnational capital will go in using the armour of coercion to uphold their power, these episodes retain their historic significance and are key to understanding the present.¹⁶

By 1979, the entire set of compromises on which corporate liberalism had been based were called into question. While clamping down on trade unions, the bourgeoisie mounted tax revolts and sought to roll back concessions made after the war.¹⁷ This countermovement culminated in the 'Volcker Shock', the decision by the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, to wring inflation out of the economy by raising real interest rates, eventually to around 20 per cent. This undercut the compromises of the previous period, imposing high unemployment at home and throwing the Third World into a debt crisis. The Soviet bloc, notably Poland, as well as non-aligned, socialist Yugoslavia, found themselves in serious payments crises, and the beginning of the final demise of the USSR and that of the bloc as a whole must be dated to the early 1980s. As has been observed often enough, the Volcker Shock was more disastrous for the forces ranged against capital and the West than any military operation would have been.¹⁸

In the same year, 1979, NATO decided to upgrade its missile arsenal aimed at Warsaw Pact command centres. President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, recommended arming Afghan Islamists against the communist regime in Kabul, thus provoking a Soviet intervention.¹⁹ One by one, the forces ranged against capital and the West came under attack. A protracted process of rolling back (quasi-)socialist or otherwise independent regimes in the Third World was set in motion. Alexander Haig, Ronald Reagan's first secretary of state, called the very notion of a 'Third World' into question and denounced national liberation as 'terrorism'; his successor, George Shultz, in January 1984 even claimed that the partition of Europe after the war had 'never been recognised by the United States'. Thus they signalled that the international compromises on which the post-war world order had been based no longer applied.²⁰

The second Cold War also disrupted economic détente between western Europe and the Soviet Union. The oil and gas from Russia that feeds Europe today had been discovered back in the 1960s; the Friendship oil pipeline was built in 1964 and the Soyuz, Urengoi and Yamal pipelines followed after West Germany started purchasing Soviet gas.²¹ It culminated in 1980 with a contract for a gas pipeline from Urengoi in north Siberia to Bavaria, signed by a heavy-industry consortium headed by Deutsche Bank. This 25-year agreement would also make the USSR a major, stable market for German and other European exports. All this was too much for Washington and Assistant Secretary of Defence Richard Perle called for a 'well-designed program of economic sanctions [that] can both damage the development of the Soviet economy and slow the growth of their defence industrial base'.²² An Atlantic compromise was still struck at the Versailles G7 in 1982 to make credit to Moscow more expensive, but a subsequent decree from Washington ordered US companies and licence-holders to discontinue all participation in the pipeline's construction. By various acts of sabotage, economic or otherwise, the project was seriously slowed down. Meanwhile massive deficit spending to finance across-the-board rearmament in the United States switched European attention to the other side of the Atlantic again; with it came a renewed Cold War discipline that relegated the interests associated with East–West trade to a subordinate role.²³

As the mood in the ageing leadership in Moscow, unable to adjust to the intensity of the second Cold War, slowly descended into despondency and a sense of inevitable decline, the forces in the state class intent on privatising state property were emboldened by the pressure applied from the West.²⁴ This time the Cold War was really 'waged', not as a posture on the basis of an (incomplete) set of compromises, but as a fight to the end. This is what is playing out again before our eyes. Just as Gorbachev was forced to sign the act of capitulation in 1991, the current Western campaign against 'Putin' aims at a complete surrender of Russia, that is, pro-Western regime change in Moscow – a process which the Trump presidency has effectively been compelled to continue.

Now, just as productive capital dominated the corporate-liberal, first Cold War; so finance, or 'money capital', whose perspective was then universalised into a new normalcy, led the way in the second Cold War. Finance had been placed under a repressive regime when the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 forced banks to separate their international,

high-risk investment operations from the deposit banking activities needed to credit-finance mass production industry and trade. However, as Gary Burn has documented, money capital was only hibernating in the City of London during this period of financial repression.²⁵ As it reasserted its dominance beginning in the de-regulationist 1980s, it undermined anything even remotely associated with collective values, let alone socialism. Liberalism's principle of formal equivalence, in other words, was pushed more deeply into the social structure, removing hitherto 'internal', socially protective and redistributive arrangements.

Meanwhile, the lifting of Glass-Steagall-era restrictions on bank operations (the law itself was finally abrogated by the Clinton administration in 1999, long after it had effectively ceased to function) entailed, inevitably, the resurgence of financial operations in the sphere of 'money-dealing': financial asset investment, currency trading, stock brokerage, and so on. So even if Volcker and his entourage may have been inspired by the needs of the capitalist system, the rise of so-called *rentier* incomes also dates from the Volcker Shock and soon assumed the format of a veritable 'revenge of the *rentier*'²⁶ – the class fraction whose 'euthanasia' Keynes had recommended in the 1930s to make the management of mass production and national class compromise viable. Privatisation policies gave asset-owning middle classes a chance to profit from booming stock markets, whilst rising asset prices, notably real estate, allowed them to borrow against the value of their (mortgaged) property. As defeats of the labour movement multiplied, the post-war class compromise was narrowed to a compromise with asset-owning middle classes and top management in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁷

In the ensuing process of state capture, governments reduced taxation in the higher income brackets and then borrowed from those no longer taxed, inflating public debt.²⁸ Even so, as long as the state-socialist bloc remained intact, this alone placed limits on relaxing the systemic direction, including the (second) Cold War posture. However, after the (state-)capitalist restoration in China and, especially, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the USSR, which dragged down the entire, state-managed Third World with it (celebrated by Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis²⁹), no systemic, external opponents to capitalism and the West were left. This removed the shackles on speculative capital and inaugurated an epochal restructuring under a new concept of control, best labelled *predatory* neoliberalism. Under this concept, the current, new Cold War is being waged. First, let us briefly review the aftermath of the second Cold War to understand the forces unleashed in the post-Soviet sphere.

Collapse of the USSR and Western advance into the post-Soviet space

The second Cold War, like the first, revealed its underlying thrust as it closed. Just as the underlying compromise framework of the first Cold War came out expressly in *détente*, financialised, predatory capitalism powerfully asserted itself in the relationship with the post-Soviet space, which became the first terrain on which speculative money-dealing, rather than productive, capital, and the accompanying policy of authoritarianism rather than compromise, were given a free hand.

Neoliberal 'war of manoeuvre' in Russia

At the July 1991 G7 meeting in London, Gorbachev was told that he would have to implement the radical shock therapy pioneered by Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs in Poland in 1989, without delay and even more rapidly.³⁰ Whilst Gorbachev prevaricated, a half-hearted, clumsily executed coup by conservative elements seeking to maintain the old USSR in August 1991 unwittingly decided the matter: The coup may have been the result of the KGB overhearing Gorbachev's promise to his rival, Boris Yeltsin, to remove the conservatives,³¹ just as Western intelligence may have exploited the opportunities Gorbachev's promise offered by providing Yeltsin with intercepts of the conversations between the KGB and the Defence Ministry and allowing him to mount what David Lane calls an 'effective counter-coup'.³²

In December, following consultations with the leaders of Belarus and Ukraine, Yeltsin dissolved the Soviet Union and forced Gorbachev to resign. Now a veritable 'war of manoeuvre' started removing social protection. As Richard Sakwa writes, 'the Western-dominated international system itself, particularly in the form of international financial organizations, took on the role of the Comintern of old, exhorting a weak indigenous government to ever more radical acts of liberal domestic economic transformation'.³³ The disruptive and predatory economic policies of international financial institutions and ideologues, such as Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs or Anders Åslund of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, were imposed, accompanied by brutal authoritarianism leading to an economic and social abyss.

Across the former USSR, fortunes were made by selling Soviet stocks of oil and minerals and privatisation of state assets in what Misha Glenny calls the 'grandest larceny in history', followed by 'the single biggest flight of capital the world has ever seen'.³⁴ Whilst ordinary people struggled with skyrocketing liberalised prices for everyday items, the prices of existing stocks of commodities remained frozen at Soviet levels, with world market prices often up to 40 times higher. This spawned huge business empires within a short period. In Russia and, with a delay, also in Ukraine, such criminal processes created new oligarchies. At the receiving end, society disintegrated and poverty exploded. 'For the great majority of Russian families', Stephen Cohen famously wrote later in the decade, 'their country has not been in "transition" but in an endless collapse of everything essential to a decent existence'.³⁵ The social drama of predatory enrichment and austerity, played out in slow-motion in the West, here was staged all in one go.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, there was resistance. The Russian parliament voted to repeal the special powers granted to Yeltsin in March 1993. The president promptly declared a state of emergency, only to see it thrown out by the Constitutional Court. When parliament next adopted a budget rejecting IMF-imposed austerity, the United States let it be known that financial support would only be forthcoming if 'reform' was intensified. Yeltsin then suspended the constitution and attacked parliament with tanks and loyal troops. Warren Christopher, Bill Clinton's first secretary of state, hastily travelled to Moscow in a sign of US support.³⁷ Shock therapy was resumed and the oligarchs paid Yeltsin back for his services when they agreed, on the fringes of the 1996 Davos World Economic Forum, to lavishly finance a slick election campaign. In combination with election fraud, this ensured his victory over the communist, Zyuganov, and returned him to the Kremlin.³⁸

Globalisation and the armour of coercion

The predatory instincts of dominant financial capital require forcibly opening up all states for commodification and exploitation, in order to 'introduce and intensify ... the silent compulsion of the market'.³⁹ Regime change is a logical corollary of this. For the flow of the profits to the West⁴⁰ cannot be taken for granted as long as state sovereignty persists. Hence, in the words of Claude Serfati, 'the defence of "globalisation" against those who would threaten it, should ... be placed at the top of the security agenda'.⁴¹

As an element of the ascendant concept of control, 'the defence of globalisation', too, required express articulation and, right from 1991, it began to appear in new strategic doctrines. The first and perhaps foundational one is the Wolfowitz Doctrine, named after Paul Wolfowitz, undersecretary of defence in the Bush Sr. administration, who produced the *Defence Planning Guidance for Fiscal 1994-99* (DPG) of 1992. It proclaims the United States as the world's sole superpower; which must remain ahead of all possible contenders in arms technology and refuse to accept military parity, as with the USSR during the first two Cold Wars. The newly self-confident European Union, too, was obliquely warned that the United States alone would handle global policing.⁴²

The Clinton administration did not reject the Wolfowitz Doctrine, including the 'unilateral use of force',⁴³ but it also relied on three further, explicitly interventionist ones. One was laid down by former US ambassador Morton Abramowitz, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in 1992. *Self-Determination in the New World Order* recommended that US intervention support 'groups within states ... staking claims to independence, greater autonomy, or the overthrow of an existing government' and who by doing so, risk becoming exposed to 'humanitarian calamities'.⁴⁴ This became a moral justification for 'humanitarian intervention' to be applied in Yugoslavia and other regime-change operations that followed, including in the former Soviet space.

Second, the infamous 'War on Terror'. Usually associated with the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, the concept was in fact elaborated already in a series of conferences between 1979 and 1984 at the initiative of Israeli Likud politicians, and with high-level Anglo-American neoconservatives in attendance.⁴⁵ It sought to make Israel's occupation policy of Palestine and its incursion into Lebanon part of the (second) Cold War. While the unexpected demise of the USSR temporarily eclipsed the concept, Samuel Huntington revived it in his *Clash of Civilizations* (1993). By placing Russia and China outside the boundary of Western civilisation along with 'Islam', Huntington restored a comprehensive 'logic of encounter' against the overly optimistic End of History thesis, in which the unbounded universe of global capital is free from contestation and ambiguity.⁴⁶ Huntington drew the boundary with Slavic civilisation to the east of the Baltic countries, but Belarus and Ukraine (along with Romania and Yugoslavia) were characterised as 'cleft countries', ineligible for inclusion in NATO ('the security organization of Western civilization').⁴⁷

This limit was not recognised by Huntington's patron, Zbigniew Brzezinski, whom we may credit with conceiving the third post-1991 US doctrine expanding on the Wolfowitz Doctrine. In *The Grand Chessboard* of 1997, Brzezinski's focus is on Eurasia, proposing, amongst others, to cut Russia up into three separate republics. Ukraine, properly reformed and integrated into the central European 'family', could, somewhere between

2005 and 2010, 'become ready for serious negotiations with both the EU and NATO'.⁴⁸ By the year 2010 a 'critical core of European security', encompassing France, Germany, Poland and Ukraine, would emerge, giving the West the much-needed strategic-military depth against Russia, which in the past had one-sidedly exploited this advantage to absorb and defeat the two great land invasions, by Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany, respectively. Ukraine, according to Brzezinski, had already shown its potential during the dissolution of the USSR with the 'sudden coup-like imposition of Ukrainian command over the Soviet army units on Ukrainian soil, that prevented the [Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS] from becoming merely a new name for a more confederal USSR'. Without Ukraine, Russia, on the other hand, would become 'Asianised', more remote from Europe. Therefore it was essential to ensure that Russia 'clearly and unambiguously' accept the separation of Ukraine from its sphere of influence.⁴⁹

In various combinations, these different doctrines have informed US policymakers' worldviews and their strategy towards the post-Soviet space in particular. Whilst the Wolfowitz Doctrine is the general presupposition, Abramowitz, Huntington and Brzezinski each added regionally specific variations, and for our purposes, the latter's proposals with respect to Ukraine certainly are the most pertinent for their disregard of Russian sensibilities and security concerns. When Bill Clinton's second-term secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, an acolyte of Brzezinski's (and herself credited with coining the notion of the United States as the 'indispensable nation'⁵⁰), visited Kiev in April 2000, she called Ukraine one of the four key countries with which the United States wanted to deepen ties. Still in 2007, Assistant Secretary of Defence Elissa Slotkin predicted that the Ukrainian army in 2020 would be interoperable with NATO.⁵¹ Of course, these signals alarmed, and were meant to alarm, policymakers in Moscow.

The eastward turn of the European Union and NATO enlargement

The European military and political balance was completely overturned when the Soviet bloc collapsed and West-Germany re-incorporated the German Democratic Republic. By having its nominal sovereignty restored, united Germany became the dominant power in Europe again and the new EU, enshrined in the 1991 Treaty of Maastricht, reoriented the main axis of European integration, which had pointed south in the 1980s (bringing in Greece in 1981, and Spain and Portugal in 1986), towards the east.⁵²

The Maastricht Treaty and German reunification terminated the corporate liberal format that had characterised western European integration from the beginning. Throughout, France had successfully sought to contain the economically more powerful West-Germany by incorporating Bonn's political and/or economic aspirations (often encouraged by the United States and Britain in the Cold War context) into 'European' structures of permanent consultation.⁵³ However, European capital too wanted to join the restructuring away from class and international compromise. The newly founded European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), after a brief flirtation with protectionism (which reflected the outgoing corporate liberalism, notably in France under Mitterrand during 1980–83), spearheaded the reorientation to neoliberal, financialised capitalism. Its strategy of abrogating the social contract with organised labour was brought out by ERT reports identifying 'inflexible labour markets' as hampering 'competitiveness'.⁵⁴ This was

true to the extent that the historic defeats of the labour movement in the Anglophone heartland had given business in these countries a competitive advantage; the United States, in particular, succeeded in imposing radical wage repression and on that basis became a magnet for foreign investment from the Reagan 'revolution' onwards.⁵⁵

With German reunification, France's policy of keeping the lid on its neighbour's aspirations could not continue. In the new situation, the United States also opposed any departure from the Cold War Atlantic commitments. The promises made by Secretary of State James Baker and others to Gorbachev that eastern Germany would not become militarised if united Germany joined NATO, and that once Russia pulled out its 24 divisions from the east, the alliance would not advance 'one inch' eastwards, were soon forgotten.⁵⁶ When France revived the idea of an independent European military force as an alternative to NATO in mid-1991, the idea was met with 'immediate and unambiguous opposition' from Washington.⁵⁷ Likewise, when Germany responded to centrifugal pressures in Yugoslavia by supporting Slovenian and Croatian aspirations for secession, the United States, in line with the Wolfowitz Doctrine, moved to restrain German ambitions by encouraging Islamic Bosnian and, later, Kosovo Albanian statehood, partly motivated by the need to compensate for the suspicion in the Muslim world aroused by the first Gulf War, and partly out of a design to gain access to Central Asian energy resources left unprotected after the dissolution of the USSR.⁵⁸

In fact, Washington was even more ambitious, projecting a US-dominated NATO eastward. In November 1991, NATO countries signed up to the principle of out-of-area operations and by the end of Bill Clinton's first term in office, pressure for actual NATO enlargement was growing.⁵⁹ Oil companies exploring opportunities around the Caspian and the Black Sea, as well as the US aerospace industry and the Wall Street banks that assisted it in a series of mega-mergers, were all for it. The 'US Committee to Expand NATO' was chaired by the director of strategic planning at Lockheed Martin. According to the US ambassador to NATO, Robert E. Hunter, enlargement would ensure Western influence and produce 'robust allies to play a full role in the security of the continent'.⁶⁰

In January 1994, the North Atlantic Council in Brussels expanded the alliance to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and later in the year NATO undertook its first out-of-area operation against the Bosnian Serbs. The readiness for this risky departure from NATO's earlier mission was ultimately rooted in the ascendancy of speculative finance and fits into the worldview it espouses. 'Since 1989 the Alliance has attempted to institutionalise a new set of norms and to create a new identity', writes Michael Williams. 'As in its early days, NATO today is working to create a new "social reality"—this time a reality that reinforces the *Zeitgeist* of the risk society'.⁶¹

NATO enlargement would not end in central Europe. In 1994 Ukraine became the first CIS state to join the Partnership for Peace, the newly created waiting room for NATO membership. President Leonid Kravchuk also signed away the country's nuclear arsenal in exchange for a guarantee (by the United States, Britain and Russia) 'to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine'.⁶² As the investment banker and diplomat, Richard Holbrooke, entrusted with the Yugoslavia portfolio in the State Department, wrote in a 1995 article in *Foreign Affairs*, entitled 'America, a European power', 'the West must expand to central Europe as fast as possible in fact as well as in spirit, and the United States is ready to lead the way'.⁶³

This claim also appeared to apply to the non-Russian, former Soviet republics. To quell Russian concerns, the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 in its Chapter IV laid down that no NATO nuclear weapons and permanent troop deployments would be based in the new member states.⁶⁴ Yet in the same year Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova joined a low-key organisation of former Soviet republics (with the acronym GUAM) under the auspices of the United States, the UK and Turkey. Uzbekistan joined in 1999, adding one more 'U'; it left again in 2005 after a failed, Western-supported colour revolution,⁶⁵ but not before attending NATO's 50th anniversary Washington conference in April. The conference cemented the transformation of the alliance from a defensive one to a military arm of Western capitalism, the 'armour of coercion' of neoliberal global governance. Still in 1999, GUUAM members Ukraine and Azerbaijan demonstrated their newfound Atlantic allegiance by preventing Russia from supplying the Serbian army and even Russia's own peacekeeping units at Kosovo's Priština airport.⁶⁶

Yugoslavia would become the showcase of the new Western strategy towards eastern Europe; the United States as a 'European power' here worked to enfold EU enlargement towards the east into NATO's. For the Maastricht Treaty was not just the quasi-constitution of economic and monetary union imposing austerity on member states, but also entailed a common foreign and defence policy. In the Yugoslav crisis the EU discovered that there was no way this common policy could diverge from NATO's and the same would hold in the Ukrainian crisis of 2013–14. In hindsight, the dissolution of Yugoslavia served as a dress rehearsal for later events in Ukraine, with Serbia in the role of Russia and Kosovo's KLA the prototype of the Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and fascists who seized power in February 2014.⁶⁷ NATO enlargement also exposed the EU directly to the consequences of any American confrontation policy towards Moscow. Its reliance on Russian gas and the potential of extensive economic and cultural interdependence were now effectively made hostage to the interests of the US war machine.

Russia's new contender posture

Vladimir Putin initially persisted in the strategy of bringing Russia closer to Europe by continuing its capitalist course, even emphasising civilian economic development as the means to restore the country's world role. In his *Millennium Manifesto* of 1999, issued just before he assumed the presidency, Putin explicitly recognised Russia's contender state tradition. Like France in the long eighteenth century, Germany and Japan until 1945, and the Soviet Union, contender states historically relied, both to overcome internal fissures and resist Western hegemony, on a strong state controlling society. Putin reiterated the time-tested precondition of sovereignty in the face of Western liberal capitalism in his *Manifesto*: 'Our state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people.' A year later he added that this directive role of the state should be complemented by a *pliant society*, or as he put it, work was needed for civil society to 'become a full partner of the state'.⁶⁸

The new president and his entourage did not foresee, naively perhaps, that this return to Russia's historically effective state/society complex would result in conflict with the West. In 2002, however, in response to the steady build-up of Western forward positions in the Baltic states and in other post-Soviet republics via GU(U)AM

and following earlier attempts to restore some form of a common security organisation with former Soviet republics, Moscow established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The CSTO united Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and, until 2005, when it downgraded its membership to association, Turkmenistan.⁶⁹ In line with the Wolfowitz Doctrine, the United States from the start refused to grant any licence to this security arrangement. When it transpired that NATO's Danish Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, was contemplating a possible cooperation with the CSTO, the US ambassador to NATO intervened, as the CSTO was seen as antagonistic to the promotion of US interests in the former Soviet republics.⁷⁰

Putin's initial assessment (in the *Millennium Manifesto*) that in the new epoch, economic, not military, power would determine a state's position in the world order, was brutally contradicted by the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Russian president himself chose not to overly confront the invading powers, but he did not fail to note that 'certain countries sometimes use their strong and well armed national armies to increase their zones of strategic influence rather than fighting [the] evils we all face'.⁷¹ Even NATO expansion was played down as long as Russia's strategic interests were being respected, given that, as Putin did not fail to emphasise, tens of millions of Russians live in the newly independent post-Soviet countries. Yet, slowly but surely, the West withdrew from its commitments including those in the arms control process made in the 1970s and 1980s. Crucially, the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 and made plans for a missile defence system deployed in the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania. As a result Moscow became more reluctant to accommodate NATO.⁷²

As Russia once again mutated to a contender state role, the disparate elements of new wealth and state power also began to fuse into a single state class again. Thus emerged a capitalist-oriented, state-oligarchic class that crystallised around the Bonapartist figure of the president. As a result, 'from 2004 the idea of reducing the state's role was reversed. It became the policy instead to bring the commanding heights of the economy under the control of large organizations (many owned wholly or substantially by the state) which were directed by people close to the Kremlin'.⁷³ Energy prices obviously expanded the options of a strong and directive state, but the property relations governing Russia's resources also were made part of the resurrection of a contender posture.

From early 2000 Putin clamped down on 'crony capitalism', that is, oligarchs' direct access to state power; first those who opposed his political project. Thus the media tycoon, Vladimir Gusinsky, emigrated to Israel in June, and Boris Berezovsky, whose millions had been earned by bleeding the Lada car maker, Avtovaz, via its dealerships network, repaired to London in November.⁷⁴ Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the energy oligarch (estimated fortune, \$8 billion in 2003), on the other hand, attempted to build opposition to Putin by buying up members of the Duma to support his plans to build a trans-Siberian pipeline to China. He was also negotiating with ExxonMobil and Chevron about US participation in his Yukos concern, which he planned to merge with Sibneft into the world's largest oil company. Khodorkovsky was arrested and given an extended prison sentence for fraud in 2005. Yukos was brought back into the Russian patrimony via a

proxy construction involving state-owned Rosneft and Gazprom, as part of broader subordination of the economy to the state.⁷⁵

Earlier in 2005, the Russian government announced that foreign companies would no longer be entitled to bid for oil, gas, gold or copper deposits. In late 2006, Shell was forced to sell its majority share in the natural gas extraction project known as Sakhalin-2 to Gazprom, and half a year later, in June 2007, the British-Russian holding company TNK-BP likewise had to sell its concession in eastern Siberia to Gazprom.⁷⁶ The overlap between Gazprom and the Russian state, a characteristic of the state class role in a contender formation, had been evident already under Yeltsin (e.g. via his prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin). Dmitry Medvedev, the Gazprom chairman (not to be confused with deputy CEO Alexander Medvedev) was prime minister under Putin and president of Russia from 2008 until 2012; he was succeeded at Gazprom by former prime minister Viktor Zubkov, and so on.

Hence, when Gazprom began building alliances to secure its European market at the same time, this had immediate geopolitical consequences. In 2005 Gazprom agreed with the outgoing government of Gerhard Schröder to build a pipeline across the Baltic directly to Germany, 'Nord Stream' (for which Berlin granted a €1 billion credit guarantee). To realise the project, E.ON and Ruhrgas linked up with Gazprom, Wintershall (a subsidiary of BASF) with Urengoygazprom. Former Chancellor Schröder became the chairman of the board of the joint venture, Achimgaz.⁷⁷ This venture fitted into a strategy of state-owned energy concerns to develop relations with Western capital; Gazprom's affiliations with European companies increased to 66 in 2007, compared to 37 ten years earlier.⁷⁸

In June 2007, Gazprom agreed with ENI of Italy to construct a pipeline under the Black Sea, 'South Stream', in order to bypass the unreliable Ukrainian grid, which in January 2006 and again a year later had been shut off over payment arrears. As the largest consumers of Russian gas in Europe, Italy and Germany were keen on direct links; at the EU level, other interests weighed in and rival pipelines, TGI (Turkey–Greece–Italy), the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP) and the planned Nabucco pipeline (through Turkey), were intended to bypass Russia instead. Indeed, it was the EU's plan to link to the Caspian reserves through Nabucco that prompted the \$40 billion South Stream project, the most expensive pipeline in history.⁷⁹ Planned to make landfall on the Bulgarian coast and then branch out across south-east Europe as far as Austria, South Stream involved ENI (itself 30 percent state-owned), Électricité de France, and again, Wintershall, with the Russian state's gas monopoly. Romano Prodi, prime minister of Italy (and ex-CEO of FIAT), who first discussed it with Putin in late 2006, was offered the chairmanship. He declined, possibly because as a former president of the European Commission he realised this would become a contentious project for various reasons.⁸⁰

From 2007–8 on, Russia would conclude a series of agreements with Turkey (to which it already supplied gas through the Blue Stream pipeline across the Black Sea), Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Hungary, Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia. These not only secured the respective sections of the South Stream pipeline, but also established stronger ties between these countries, several of them NATO and EU member states, and Russia. At the end of the 3,300-kilometre pipeline, the gas would be stored in Austria's Baumgarten storage and distribution hub, originally planned for Iranian gas and part of the energy infrastructure of the EU's Trans-European Networks (TEN) initiative

earlier: Through its partnership with Austria's OMV energy corporation, Gazprom secured access to the Baumgarten trading floor.⁸¹

Obviously this EU–Eurasian connection, even more than the cooperation with the CSTO briefly floated by Rasmussen, posed a direct threat to US-led global governance. The consolidation of the Russian state coincided with plans to build a Eurasian economic bloc, and with the appearance on the scene of the BRICS. The term's origins could not have lain farther from their eventual emergence as a rival contender formation: the acronym was coined by economists from Goldman Sachs to denote the 'emerging markets' potential of Brazil, Russia, India and China. However, as the operations of Anglo-American finance and foreign policy adventurism began to destabilise the global political economy, the BRICS slowly converged on a contender profile, adding South Africa to their ranks for regional balance and 'altering the conditions of international interactions for other players—whether states, firms, or international organizations—in parallel ways'.⁸²

From Washington's perspective, the new prominence of state-owned companies in shaping the transnational energy economy appeared to resurrect the détente constellation that Reagan had sought to dislodge in the second Cold War. Gazprom's agreement with NIOC of Iran and the conclusion of a joint venture with ENI to exploit Libyan gas set all alarm bells ringing in key NATO capitals. The ENI deal was sealed in a meeting with Prime Minister Berlusconi when Putin returned from Tripoli, where he had cancelled \$4.5 billion of Libyan debt.⁸³ Already in May 2006, following the gas shutdown to Ukraine in January, the US Senate unanimously adopted a resolution calling on NATO to protect the energy security of its members and have it develop a diversification strategy. Senator Richard Lugar, in a much-noted speech prior to the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, in November 2006, argued in favour of designating the manipulation of the energy supply as a 'weapon' that can activate Article 5 of the NATO treaty (common defence).⁸⁴ Thus Russia was identified as a strategic antagonist on account of its role as Europe's energy supplier.

The third Cold War and speculative finance

The first Cold War had been part of the complex of compromises imposed on Fordist industry as the dominant fraction of capital and regulated by the concept of corporate liberalism; after it expired, a systemic neoliberalism seeking to impose market discipline on the process of global restructuring inspired the second Cold War. The third Cold War, too, is driven by a specific coalition, or historic bloc, with its specific ideology and practices. This bloc is configured around speculative, 'money-dealing' capital, immersed in high-risk operations both economically and politically, and with many links to the public and private security sectors, capital's 'armour of coercion'.

Unlike the systemic view of the accumulation cycle (the Volcker perspective of 1979, in which money capital functions as 'capital-in-general'), money-dealing capital, or in contemporary lingo, 'trade in financial services', has no long-term vision of a social order: As a form of commercial capital it is only marginally connected to the production of surplus value, on which it preys from the outside, via the profit distribution process. Hence, issues other than buying cheap and selling dear (such as research and development,

long-term investment, and the social stability required for it to mature) are secondary to its mode of operation. Peter Gowan captures the shift when he writes that 'trading activity here does not mean long-term investment ... in this or that security, but buying and selling financial and real assets to *exploit—not least by generating—price differences and price shifts*' ('speculative arbitrage').⁸⁵

Until 1991, the instability inherent in such a perspective was held in check by the systemic requirement of reordering the global economy whilst keeping the Soviet bloc from linking up with socialist tendencies elsewhere, such as those surfacing in Central America at the time. Still, the 1987 stock market crash and the ensuing 'Greenspan put' (adding liquidity to facilitate further speculative operations) made clear that making others pay for one party's reckless gambling ('moral hazard') was becoming embedded deep into the system. After the collapse of state socialism, commercial-financial operators, exploiting new accounting rules and legal loopholes, assembled allies among politicians and ('micro'-)economists into an array of forces eager to be part of the trend for a variety of reasons and ideologically armed by newly refurbished theories of capital markets seen as capable of self-regulation, such as the 'efficient market hypothesis'.⁸⁶ Predatory raids on companies, pension funds, and the use of derivatives as collateral for increased borrowing, now became the new normal. In 1994, John Meriwether, who had pioneered 'proprietary trading' (speculating not just on commission but also with a bank's own or leveraged money and deposit base) at Salomon Brothers, set up his own hedge fund, Long Term Capital Management (LTCM), with two 'Nobel' (Swedish central bank) laureates in economics.⁸⁷

The transformation of capitalism towards a casino-like risk society was pioneered and glamorised in Anglo-America by Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and their peers in Canada and Australasia. The global workforce, which after the opening up of China, eastern Europe and other areas would grow to more than three billion, twice its previous size, counts for little from this perspective. Reduced to an ultimately unprotected human mass, its life revolves around endless 'choice' amidst structural insecurity.⁸⁸ Middle-class savings are not considered off-limits for predatory raiding either. For the top players in the casino, on the other hand, the state becomes an insurance structure, assigned the role of bailing speculative operators out of the crises they cause and presenting the bill to society through austerity and the consequences of lax monetary policy.

When LTCM went bankrupt in 1998, the US Federal Reserve arranged the bailout, subordinating public policy to the interests of the gamblers. Sustaining this function required ruling out rival arrangements: when in the midst of the Asian financial crisis (also in 1998) Japan proposed an Asian Monetary Fund to stabilise the situation, Washington immediately vetoed the idea, and the proposal was killed off so that 'the IMF [remained] at the forefront of the bailout'.⁸⁹ US global governance thus was turned into a permanent insurance scheme for predatory raiding. The bailouts only 'allowed the financial turmoil to transmute into yet another stock market/housing bubble', a process backed up by privatisation and deregulation, which, as Christopher Rude comments, is 'as important in maintaining global capitalism under US domination as the role played by ... the US military in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere'.⁹⁰

In the absence of a functioning social compromise in society, there emerged a general tendency towards authoritarianism, along with the contamination of the

public sphere by distortion and misrepresentation of fact. Gramsci characterises this as an intermediate phase of 'corruption/fraud', between consent and coercion, when hegemony is difficult to achieve and overt force still risky; the perfect environment for the rise of right-wing populist and even neo-Nazi parties.⁹¹ The mainstream media contributes to this tendency: the Ukraine crisis illustrates how demagoguery and scare-mongering obfuscate a sober assessment of the state of the world. *Real* dangers, such as the endless spiral of new weapons development, arms trade and proliferation, on the other hand are mostly ignored; even the degradation of the biosphere is turned into an object of speculative gain through emissions exchanges and other financial operations.⁹²

Preying on the 'Wild East': finance and civil society

In the post-Soviet sphere, neoliberalism sought to create a new predatory ruling class out of the most ruthless elements of its elites. In Gowan's words:

The West urged that those who managed to accumulate money-capital under Communism should form the core of the new domestic capitalist class. These people have been mainly illegal currency speculators and black marketeers as well as corrupt members of state administrations, especially in the import-export sectors. Such people have shown entrepreneurial spirit, albeit of a criminal kind.⁹³

Gowan cites Geoffrey Howe, Thatcher's chancellor of the exchequer who became adviser to the Ukrainian government in 1991, proposing a 'bandit capitalism' for the area on the model of American robber baron capitalism. Another key supporter of this process is George Soros, the émigré Hungarian financier and epitome of predatory neoliberalism. Having secured his notoriety in 1992 when he netted \$950 million by betting \$10 billion against the British pound, forcing the UK out of the European Monetary System, Soros joined the board of the Carlyle Group, the fast-rising private equity firm dealing in defence-related assets and stacked with former top politicians, such as James Baker (already mentioned as secretary of state in the Bush Sr. administration) and many others.⁹⁴

Soros admires the founders of the neoliberal Mont Pèlerin Society, Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper; not only for their views on the self-regulating market but also for their radical rejection of a protective role for the state. This inspired him to launch an Open Society Fund (OSF), after the title of one of Popper's books, to activate the 'civil societies' in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, roll back any remaining social protection and undermine their very sovereignties. Soros disbursed large sums to opposition groups through the OSF and the Soros Foundation and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) even before 1989, financed groups active in the resistance to the 1991 conservative communist coup against Gorbachev and paid for Jeffrey Sachs' travels across the former Soviet bloc. An Open Media Research Institute in Prague; Central European University, eventually in Budapest, and various other operations made Soros a key figure in the 'transition'. As discussed later in this book, he set up a dedicated Renaissance Foundation for Ukraine, too. Needless to say, Soros also picked up assets in the former Soviet bloc, benefiting from opportunities he had contributed to creating.⁹⁵ Andreas

Treichl, CEO of Austria's Erste Bank, one of the largest lenders in eastern Europe, chairs the OSF's European Advisory Board.⁹⁶

Soros's use of 'civil society' instruments has official precedent. The Reagan administration's Project Democracy was established in 1981 under the auspices of the National Security Council and two years later, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was formally incorporated by Congress as its 'overt', public arm. The idea was to broaden Western intervention beyond covert action by intelligence or military force and include the mobilisation of civil society, for which American academics had developed appropriate doctrines. This concept and the institutions it fathered would prove their worth in a series of colour revolutions that tore through the former Soviet bloc, besides demonstrating their effectiveness in the Philippines and later in the Middle East.⁹⁷

The term 'civil society' here refers to those potentially oppressed and, crucially, passive and/or pliant forces (other than labour and the left, of course), that may be seized upon as a pretext for humanitarian intervention as defined in the Abramowitz Doctrine. It comprises, in the words of Diana Johnstone, 'a complex of various minorities, and therefore defence of ethnic, religious or sexual minority rights is a fertile field for movements with the potential to weaken support for central governments'.

By their emotional impact, identity movements can destabilize governments without in any way interfering with the growing domination of finance capital in determining economic and social relations, as economically-based social movements might do. *Civil society is a good breeding ground for the formation of self-selected elites eligible for recruitment to U.S.-managed globalization.*⁹⁸

US civil society activists were already advising the Lithuanian opposition in 1990; the Baltic states would eventually become NATO and EU members in 2004, often under the auspices of émigré politicians having returned from North America.⁹⁹

By 2003, US attention again turned to Georgia and Ukraine, which supported the invasion of Iraq and kept their distance from the continental European and Russian opposition to it.¹⁰⁰ The cultivation of pro-Western elites in Georgia had the added advantage that the country was a way station on the projected Baku–Ceyhan pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey's Mediterranean coast, besides being strategically located on the Black Sea coast. The new Georgian regime of Western-educated Mikheil Saakashvili came to power through the 'Rose Revolution' of 2003 that chased away Georgia's ex-KGB chief and Gorbachev's foreign secretary, Edouard Shevardnadze. This transition did not fail to raise Moscow's anxiety about being surrounded by unfriendly states, just as it worked to stir separatist sentiment among Russians left in these states by the break-up of the USSR. From 2001, Israel had been selling arms to Georgia on US account and its spy drones had been conducting reconnaissance flights from Georgia over southern Russia, as well as over Iran in preparation of possible Israeli aggression against that country.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile Chechen terrorist attacks in Russia and the apparent willingness of Britain and the United States to give shelter to the suspected perpetrators, led Moscow to complain that the West was pursuing 'the destruction of Russia and the filling of its huge area with numerous dysfunctional quasi-state formations'.¹⁰²

In Ukraine, individual leaders such as the Western-oriented former Central Bank director, Viktor Yushchenko, elected president in 2004, and a broader strand of expatriate Ukrainians from North America, the so-called 'Galician cousins', assisted in reorienting the country towards the West. The first US ambassador to Kiev, Roman Popadyuk, helped set up joint stock companies in Ukraine, whilst establishing a branch of the American Chamber of Commerce (ACC-UA), whose officers were also expatriates of Ukrainian descent.¹⁰³ With 1.2 million Ukrainians in Canada alone, the largest concentration outside Ukraine and Russia, there was a huge audience for ultra-nationalist narratives such as the *Holodomor*, in which the calamitous collectivisation of Soviet agriculture is recast as a Stalinist genocide specifically aimed at Ukraine.¹⁰⁴

George W. Bush visited Kiev in 2001 and, in a joint statement with the Polish president, Alexander Kwasniewski, affirmed his support for the eventual integration of Ukraine into the Western order. Ukrainian-American organisations, notably the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), organised parallel events such as annual round tables on Ukraine's Nation-Statehood, the first in November 2000, attended by Paul Wolfowitz, the Ukrainian foreign secretary, Boris Tarasyuk, as well as the aforementioned Åslund and Brzezinski.¹⁰⁵

The war to stop NATO enlargement

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 will concern us in [Chapter 2](#). Here we must note that immediately after the confirmation of Yushchenko as the rightful president, the United States, the EU and the international financial institutions rushed in to capitalise on the victory of the pro-Western forces. As WikiLeaks later disclosed, US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried travelled to Ukraine to assure the new government US backing if it stood up to Russia, as Poland and the Baltic states had done. And if it were to continue market reform, its NATO and Euro-Atlantic aspirations would be supported as well.¹⁰⁶

This was not lost on Moscow. Russia now switched from its lenient attitude towards EU and NATO enlargement to a policy of 'neo-revisionism'. In a speech in 2005 Putin insisted on Moscow's right to 'decide for itself the pace, terms, and conditions of moving towards democracy', whilst warning against destabilisation attempts like the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine ('unlawful methods of struggle').¹⁰⁷ At the annual Munich Security Conference in January 2007, Putin again expressed Russian frustration over 'democracy promotion' as a means to extend Western influence. He also warned that the transformation of one of the key pillars of European security, the OSCE, into an instrument of NATO foreign policy would backfire. Since the OSCE provided observers in various contested areas, including in South Ossetia in Georgia, and later also in eastern Ukraine (it was among the first to visit the disaster zone after the downing of the MH17), it should remain at arm's length from NATO. The Russian president also reminded his audience of the promises not to expand the Atlantic Alliance and warned that further attempts at enlargement would be very risky.¹⁰⁸ Yet NATO and the EU were inexorably pressing forward under the auspices of a directive bloc of forces led by speculative capital and relying on the 'armour of coercion'. Control over the energy

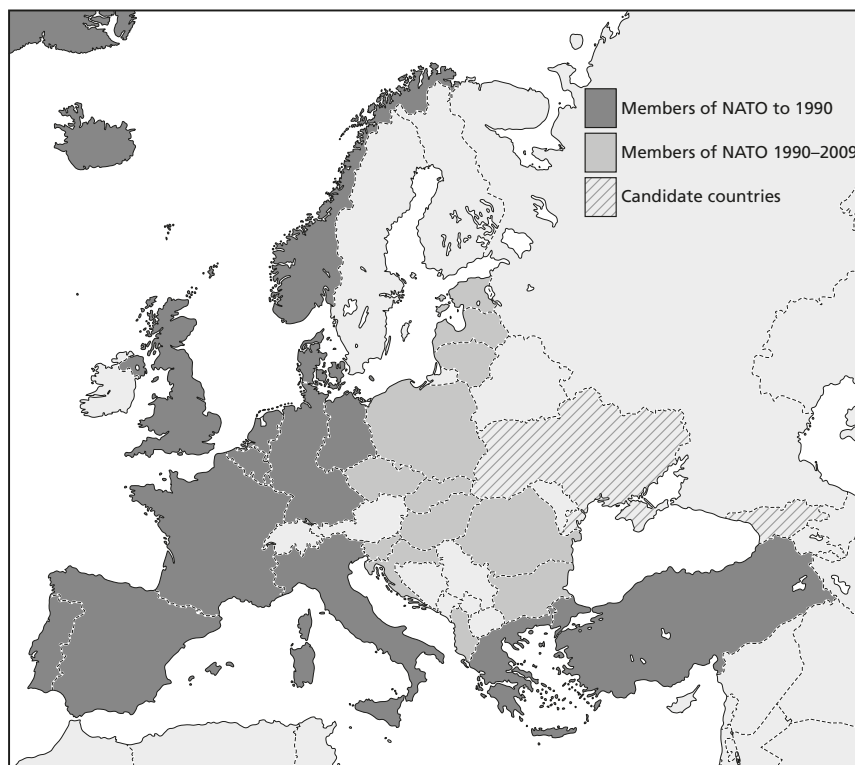
riches of the defunct USSR and the prospect of rearming the former Warsaw Pact militaries were among the key prizes to be won by the eastward advance.

In March 2008, I attended a conference in Tbilisi entitled 'Security from Europe through Turkey to South Caucasus' that yielded insights into the various forces at work. Organised by an association of 'young professionals' (aka democracy activists) under the joint auspices of the Georgian Strategic Studies Institute and Yeditepe University in Turkey, the event featured a Polish NATO representative relating how Georgia and Azerbaijan were already being funded to purchase equipment as part of a NATO interoperability programme, and a British representative of BP speaking of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline. On the plane to Tbilisi there were Israeli military men and at the conference there was much talk about how Saakashvili had allowed the United States to put an advanced radar system in Georgia and how Russian jets were testing whether it was operational.¹⁰⁹

At the Bucharest NATO summit a month later, April 2008, Ukraine and Georgia were made candidates for membership, even though Ukraine's constitution declares the country neutral. Though France and Germany, still committed to maintaining a working relationship with Moscow, kept the Bush administration from initiating the NATO inclusion process,¹¹⁰ Saakashvili, armed and encouraged by hardliners in Washington, embarked on his military adventure to recapture South Ossetia later that year. In the second half of July 2008, 1,000 US servicemen had conducted joint war games with the Georgian army, whilst an assistant of Vice-President Dick Cheney, Joseph R. Wood, visited Tbilisi briefly before the attack. Israeli arms supplies, partly in exchange for the use of airfields in the country's south, were handled by Georgian Defence Minister Kezerashvili, an Israeli citizen. His colleague, Temuri Yakobashvili, the minister for reintegration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, former ambassador to the United States, also with close ties to Israel, openly praised that country for its military assistance.¹¹¹

In the Western media, the war over South Ossetia and Abkhazia is still routinely referred to as 'the Russian invasion', yet it was initiated by the Georgian attack on the opening day of the Beijing Olympics, 8 August. The Russian 58th Army was waiting on the border with North Ossetia and although its actual performance exposed many problems, Misha Glenny rightly expressed his amazement in the *New Statesman* at how 'Saakashvili and the hawks around him came to believe the farcical proposition that Georgia's armed forces could take on the military might of their northern neighbour in a conventional fight and win'.¹¹² While Kezerashvili called on the United States to rush to Georgia's aid in the fight 'against the great Russia', the Georgian army suffered a humiliating defeat; Washington obviously had no appetite to face the consequences of its Caucasus gamble yet. As Arnaud de Borchgrave reported, while routing Georgian forces, Russian special forces also destroyed two military airfields in southern Georgia earmarked for the use by Israeli fighter-bombers in the event of an attack on Iran, taking back captured drones for inspection.¹¹³ By now, Secretary Baker's promise that NATO would not advance 'one inch' was a thing of the past, as [Figure 1.1](#) illustrates.

In an interview with CNN on 28 August, Putin accused the outgoing Bush administration of having instigated the Georgian adventure with an eye to stir up an international crisis and 'create a competitive advantage for one of the candidates fighting



1.1 History of NATO enlargement.

for the post of US president' – presumably Republican candidate John McCain, whose foreign policy adviser was a lobbyist for the Saakashvili government and whose wife Cindy was visiting Georgia at the time.¹¹⁴ This, then, was what Richard Sakwa calls 'the war to stop NATO enlargement'. The debacle was followed by declarations of independence by South Ossetia and Abkhazia. From now on, every post-Soviet republic tempted to join the Atlantic Alliance would have to reckon with Russian protection for groups resisting such integration, irrespective whether it concerned actual Russians or any other of the almost two hundred nationalities of the former USSR, and the West stood warned.

Yet the advocates of NATO enlargement were undaunted in their quest to cut Ukraine loose from Russia.¹¹⁵ Whilst the Georgia war was still going on, UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband visited Kiev and pledged Britain's support for Ukraine – whatever that meant. Ukrainian President Yushchenko in turn visited Tbilisi to underline that Russia's 1997 lease on the Sebastopol naval base, home to the Russian Black Sea fleet, would expire in 2017.¹¹⁶ Yushchenko also signed a decree requiring prior notice of all movements by Russian naval vessels and aircraft from Sebastopol.¹¹⁷

Eastern Partnership versus Eurasian Union

Meanwhile, Washington and a bloc of Baltic states led by Poland and Sweden were crafting a comprehensive Cold War response to Russia's new contender posture, the Eastern Partnership. Although nominally an EU venture, it was actually an Atlantic undertaking of which Europe was only the subcontractor: the EU would be unceremoniously sidelined when the going got tough – in February 2014.

Well before the Georgian debacle, the Bush administration had become sceptical about the outcomes of the Rose and Orange Revolutions. The incoming rulers in Tbilisi and Kiev and the oligarchs seemed interested only in private enrichment. American planners therefore began to devise ways of constitutionalising 'market democracy' in post-regime-change states.¹¹⁸ Dissatisfied with the timid proposals of her initial policy planning director, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice brought Stanford International Relations scholar, Stephen Krasner, to the State Department in 2005. In his new role, Krasner collaborated with Carlos Pascual, a former director in the National Security Council responsible for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia, and appointed US ambassador in Kiev in 2000. Pascual was credited with having convinced Kiev to join in the Iraq invasion, amidst general approval for that criminal adventure among governments in 'the new Europe'.¹¹⁹

After his return in late 2003, Pascual became Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization in the State Department and, with Krasner, devised a strategy for preventive intervention in weak states ('weakness' including ethnic or religious divisions) and a stabilisation and reconstruction rulebook listing the measures by which 'market democracy' was to be established.¹²⁰ On this basis, a list of countries liable to 'collapse in conflict' was drawn up, for which 'reconstruction blueprints' were to be prepared even if they had not yet in fact collapsed. In a talk at Georgetown University in October 2004, Pascual explained that this would not only allow intervention by rapid-response teams composed of private companies, NGOs and think tanks (saving 'three to six months in response time'), but also enable them to 'change the very social fabric of a nation' on the basis of the said contracts. As Naomi Klein reported:

The office's mandate is not to rebuild any old states ... but to create 'democratic and market-oriented' ones. So, for instance ... [Pascual's] fast-acting reconstructors might help sell off 'state-owned enterprises that created a nonviable economy'. Sometimes rebuilding, he explained, means 'tearing apart the old'.¹²¹

In this strategy, Ukraine's Naftogaz, the gas and oil holding, was such a 'state-owned enterprise' in 'a nonviable economy', although, as [Chapter 5](#) will show, the attempt to privatise it would eventually run aground in the face of oligarch resistance. Generally, however, governments in collapsed countries 'take orders well'.¹²² This would apply to all the successor states of the Soviet Union, including Russia under Yeltsin. Given Pascual's CV and the anti-Russian tendency in Washington, his reasoning also served as a blueprint for intervention in Ukraine to weld democracy promotion, economic warfare and the application of military force into a 'new art of military intervention premised on the temporary occupation and technocratic reconstruction-reconstitution of illiberal societies'.¹²³ A state benefiting from this would also find its sovereignty limited, or as Krasner

calls it, be assigned 'shared sovereignty', 'a voluntary agreement between recognized national political authorities and an external actor such as another state or a regional or international organization'.¹²⁴

The limited sovereignty contract for Ukraine, which its president would step back from signing in 2013, would take the form, paradoxically given its elaboration in Washington, of an EU Association Agreement in combination with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). It was inscribed in the Eastern Partnership, initiated by the Baltic bloc. The Partnership, an offshoot of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2004, was added to the 'multi-layered drive to expand so-called European institutions such as NATO, the European Union, and all the organizations complementing them'.¹²⁵ This drive increasingly focused on thwarting the Eurasian Economic Community of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in which Ukraine had obtained observer status in 2002. Its first concrete instalment, a Customs Union, was planned to come into effect in 2009.¹²⁶

The Eastern Partnership was proposed by the Polish foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski. A British citizen since his studies in Oxford, he only gave up his UK passport in 2006 when he was appointed minister for defence. His attitude towards Russia was revealed when he likened the Nord Stream project with Gazprom to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.¹²⁷ Via his wife, the author and US citizen, Anne Applebaum, Sikorski is part of a neoconservative coterie which also includes the co-founder of the Project for a New American Century, Robert Kagan, and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland. Nuland was on Cheney's staff in the Bush years and was kept on under Obama; she eventually became the stage manager of the *coup d'état* in Kiev in February 2014. Sikorski drafted the Eastern Partnership proposal with Sweden's foreign minister, Carl Bildt, the neoliberal nemesis of Prime Minister Olaf Palme in the 1980s, to give it more traction in the EU and dissimulate its Atlantic signature.¹²⁸ It was Bildt who identified the EU Association Agreement as a market democracy contract when he characterised it as requiring a complete make-over of the country's rules on property and competition, which in turn 'will provoke *really fundamental transformations in the long run*'.¹²⁹

In May 2008, the Eastern Partnership was offered to six former Soviet republics, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (the four GUAM states), Belarus (which briefly before had still been branded 'Europe's last dictatorship') and Armenia. It was formally launched at the Prague EU Summit of 2009. Sensing that Ukraine and the Black Sea were key targets in the envisaged partnership, from which Russia was to be excluded,¹³⁰ Moscow countered by proposing a tripartite structure with the EU and Ukraine to modernise the country's gas pipeline grid and prevent future disruptions of the supply to Europe (as had happened again in January of that year), but this was dismissed.¹³¹ Likewise, Russian proposals floated to investigate the compatibility of the Eurasian customs union and the DCFTA were judged inadmissible from the EU perspective. After the Georgia conflict, Germany and France gave up their opposition to that country's association with NATO, against a backdrop of urgent expert advice to work for closer ties with Ukraine.¹³²

The EU became the executor of this essentially Atlantic project at a time when American forward pressure towards eastern Europe had slackened due to the financial crisis and the US presidential elections and when it was expected that the Bush-era

enthusiasm for regime change would be scaled back. The EU had, moreover, abandoned its consensual approach in its drive for a European Constitution.¹³³ Though it was voted down in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, the EU rammed it through as the Lisbon Treaty without alterations (apart from trivia such as the 'European anthem') in 2007. Coming into force in 2009, it required accession countries not only to open their economies but also align their defence and security policies with those of NATO.¹³⁴ As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Baltic bloc would lead the effort of convincing other EU states of the need to draw in Ukraine, whilst the Obama administration was 'leading from behind' until it shifted gear following Putin's return to the Russian presidency in 2012, and actually directed the regime change in Kiev.

From 2010, then, the EU began binding invitees to the Eastern Partnership to the Western camp through a limited sovereignty contract including key defence provisions. However, as Richard Sakwa noted, this was bound to have grave consequences, particularly where Ukraine was concerned: 'the effective merger of EU security integration with the Atlantic security community meant that [Ukraine's] association with the EU ... took on dangerous security connotations [for Russia], as well as challenging Moscow's own plans for economic integration in Eurasia.'

The EU was launched on the path of geopolitical competition, something for which it was neither institutionally nor intellectually ready. Not only was the Association Agreement incompatible with Ukraine's existing free-trade agreements with Russia, but there was also the Lisbon [Treaty] requirement for Ukraine to align its defence and security policy with the EU. This was an extraordinary inversion: instead of overcoming the logic of conflict, the EU became an instrument for its reproduction in new forms.¹³⁵

Since the aim of the United States in this new, third Cold War, like the second, was regime change in Moscow, whilst reining in any independent European posture, it relied on the armour of coercion in every domain, including nuclear weapons.

The nuclear gamble

Full spectrum military dominance, including what Mike Davis calls 'nuclear imperialism', constitutes the ultimate backup for neoliberal global governance.¹³⁶ It gives the dominant state a wide margin of freedom in local operations such as the seizure of power in Kiev in 2014, which was the culminating point of NATO expansion over the entire period from 1991.

There is no doubt that Washington had been looking forward to an era of American nuclear superiority for some time. As two experts enthused in *Foreign Affairs* in 2006: 'It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike ... Russia and China—and the rest of the world—will live in the shadow of U.S. nuclear primacy for many years to come.' Such a first strike, according to the authors, was viable US strategy thanks to the pitiful state of Russia's deterrent.¹³⁷ This doctrine constitutes a dangerous update of the Wolfowitz Doctrine of not allowing a rival to ever impose a nuclear stalemate on the United States

again, as had been the case under the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction during the previous Cold Wars with the USSR.

US missile defence systems deployed in eastern European NATO countries after the Bush administration abrogated the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 have a crucial role to play here: their role is not only to fend off the odd missile that may be fired in retaliation after a US first strike.¹³⁸ Since the capsules of the anti-missile rockets can be fitted with new generations of *attack* missiles, they can also participate in a first strike. The US's long-term, \$1 trillion upgrade of its nuclear arsenal is expected, according to this doctrine, to give it a structural advantage (leaving aside the consequences of nuclear war for humanity as a whole in a 'nuclear winter') to pursue brinkmanship in local, lower-level interventions.¹³⁹

When the West began openly courting Ukraine and Georgia it began a highly risky incursion into Russia's immediate security zone. Conditions of EU association and membership after 2008 had already dropped all pretence of representing a framework distinct from the overall Western advance. Incidental rivalry between the United States and the EU would remain in evidence, as in the handling of the 2014 Maidan revolt in Ukraine and, eventually, also in the immediate run-up to the MH17 disaster in July of that year, but never for long.

In May 2016 the ground missile complex 'Aegis Ashore' went live in Deveselu in Romania as part of the US missile defence system, to be complemented in 2018 by a second complex in Redzikowo in Poland. Media framing of every response by Moscow to US and NATO provocations on its borders as 'Russian aggression', including 'hybrid warfare', disarmed public opinion in the West.¹⁴⁰

Can it be, then, that after US-supported regime change in Kiev had triggered a civil war, there were forces in NATO and/or in the new Ukrainian regime willing to gamble on a major conflict with Moscow to undermine Russia's Eurasian project, derail the BRICS including its New Development Bank, or indeed, interrupt the 'Land for Gas' negotiation initiated by Putin and Merkel to provide a comprehensive solution to the Ukrainian crisis? To investigate this further, we must first assess the fractures and fault-lines within Ukraine and cast light on the political profile and mentality of those helped to power in February 2014.

Notes

- 1 See Philip Hanson, 'An enfeebled economy'. In K. Giles, P. Hanson, R. Lyne, J. Nixey, J. Sherr and A. Wood, *The Russian Challenge* [Chatham House Report, June]. London: The Institute of International Affairs, 2015.
- 2 Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance*. London: Verso, 1999.
- 3 Hence the title of Richard Sakwa's indispensable *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. Sakwa calls the Russian repulsion of the Georgian invasion of South Ossetia 'the war of NATO enlargement'.
- 4 Ries Bode, 'De Nederlandse bourgeoisie tussen de twee wereldoorlogen'. *Cahiers voor de Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen*, 2 (4) 1979, pp. 9–50. English translation forthcoming in Bob Jessop and Henk Overbeek, eds, *Transnational Capital and Class Fractions: The Amsterdam School Perspective Reconsidered*. London: Routledge.

- 5 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [trans. and ed. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith]. New York: International Publishers, 1971 [written between 1929 and 1935], p. 263.
- 6 Already in Locke's original *Treatises*, there is provision for a state of emergency: John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* [intro. P. Laslett]. New York: Mentor, 1965 [1690], pp. 421, 425.
- 7 Hans van Zon, *Globalized Finance and Varieties of Capitalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 174.
- 8 Fordism was named after the automaker, Henry Ford, the pioneer of linking mass production to mass consumption as a form of social discipline. See Mark Rupert, *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *Le pouvoir confisqué: Gouvernants et gouvernés an U.R.S.S.* Paris: Flammarion, 1980, p. 26.
- 9 See my *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class*. London: Verso, 1984, pp. 90–4. Of course the term is borrowed from North American New Left authors writing about large corporations.
- 10 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* [intro. and trans. M. Nicolaus]. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973 [written 1857–58], p. 247.
- 11 Peter Dale Scott, *The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on U.S. Democracy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 135 and *passim*.
- 12 Wolfgang Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit: Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus* [Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2012]. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2013, p. 51.
- 13 Radhika Desai, *Geopolitical Economy: After US Hegemony, Globalization and Empire*. London: Pluto, 2013, p. 92.
- 14 Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit*, pp. 49–51. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973.
- 15 Radhika Desai, 'Look back in hope? Reassessing Fordism today'. In Kees van der Pijl, ed., *Handbook of the International Political Economy of Production*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015, p. 210.
- 16 See my *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq*. London: Pluto and New Delhi: Sage Vistaar, 2006, ch. 5.
- 17 See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. London: Verso, 1986, especially Part II, 'The age of Reagan', and on Thatcherite Britain, Henk Overbeek, *Global Capitalism and National Decline: The Thatcher Decade in Perspective*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, esp. chs 6 and 7.
- 18 Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, Europe and the Future of the Global Economy* [rev. edn]. London: Zed Books, 2013 [2011], p. 108.
- 19 Deepak Tripathi, *Imperial Designs: War, Humiliation and the Making of History* [foreword J. Galtung]. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013, pp. 44–5.
- 20 Citations in *Global Rivalries*, pp. 231 and 203, respectively; see also Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*, 2nd edn. London: Verso, 1986 [1983].
- 21 Peter Rutland, 'Russia as an energy superpower'. *New Political Economy*, 13 (2) 2008, p. 204.
- 22 Cited in Ronald Brownstein and Nina Easton, *Reagan's Ruling Class: Portraits of the President's Top One Hundred Officials*, 2nd edn. New York: Pantheon, 1983 [1982], p. 459.
- 23 Details and sources in *Global Rivalries*, pp. 228–37.
- 24 Dusko Doder, *Shadows and Whispers: Power Politics Inside the Kremlin from Brezhnev to Gorbachev*. New York: Random House, 1986; David M. Kotz, [with F. Weir], *Revolution from Above: The Demise of the Soviet System*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- 25 Gary Burn, *The Re-emergence of Global Finance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- 26 Jacob Morris, 'The revenge of the rentier or the interest rate crisis in the United States'. *Monthly Review*, 33 (8) 1982, pp. 28–34. See Gerald Epstein and Dorothy Power, 'The return of finance and finance's returns: recent trends in rentier incomes in OECD countries, 1960–2000'. *Research Brief, Political Economy Research Institute* (University of Massachusetts Amherst) no. 2, November 2002.

- 27 Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, 'Neo-liberal dynamics: towards a new phase?' In K. van der Pijl, L. Assassi and D. Wigan, eds, *Global Regulation: Managing Crises After the Imperial Turn*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 30.
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- 32 David Lane, *The Rise and Fall of State Socialism: Industrial Society and the Socialist State*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, p. 131.
- 33 Richard Sakwa, 'Russian political evolution: a structural approach'. In M.E. Cox, ed., *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia*. London: Pinter, 1998, p. 189, and Kotz, *Revolution from Above*, pp. 165ff.
- 34 Misha Glenny, *McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime*. London: Vintage, 2009, pp. 71–3; Kotz, *Revolution from Above*, p. 185.
- 35 Stephen F. Cohen, 'Russia: tragedy or transition'. In Cox, *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse*, p. 245.
- 36 Saskia Sassen, 'A savage sorting of winners and losers: contemporary versions of primitive accumulation'. *Globalizations*, 7 (1–2) 2010, pp. 23–50.
- 37 Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, pp. 226–30.
- 38 *Global Rivalries*, pp. 354–5.
- 39 Tim Di Muzio, 'The "art" of colonisation: capitalising sovereign power and the ongoing nature of primitive accumulation'. *New Political Economy*, 12 (4) 2007, pp. 519, 531–2.
- 40 Sean Starrs, 'The chimera of convergence'. *New Left Review*, 2nd series (87) 2014, pp. 81–96.
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- 44 Cited in Diana Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*. Petrolia: CounterPunch Books, 2016, pp. 43–4.
- 45 See, e.g., Benjamin Netanyahu, ed., *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986.
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- 50 Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 214.
- 51 Albright cited in Yuliya Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation, transnationalisation of the state and the transnational capitalist class in post-1991 Ukraine' (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 2013), p. 164; Slotkin cited in Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2017, p. 283.
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- 60 Quotes and further details in my *Global Rivalries*, pp. 272–3.
- 61 Michael J. Williams, *NATO, Security and Risk Management: From Kosovo to Kandahar*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, p. 25. Williams highlights the origins of risk society in 'a new kind of capitalism' (p. 5) and 'rampant globalization' (p. 11). See also Jan P. Nederveen Pieterse, 'Political and economic brinkmanship'. *Review of International Political Economy*, 14 (3) 2007, pp. 467–86.
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- 64 Strobe Talbott, *Text: Talbott Speech on Nato Enlargement at Atlantic Council*, 20 May 1997 (online).
- 65 Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, *The Globalization of NATO* [foreword Denis J. Halliday]. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2012, p. 166.
- 66 *Global Rivalries*, p. 281.
- 67 Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 98.
- 68 Cited in Roderic Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook on the west: from convergence to confrontation'. In Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge*, pp. 3, 5.
- 69 Nazemroaya, *The Globalization of NATO*, p. 169.
- 70 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 36.
- 71 Cited in Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook', p. 4.
- 72 Van Apeldoorn and de Graaff, *American Grand Strategy*, pp. 179–80.
- 73 Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook', p. 6. A Bonapartist leader (after Napoleon's nephew, Napoleon III, emperor of France from 1852 to 1870) is one who balances a number of different social interests, none of which is strong enough to dominate. It typically makes the leader look stronger than he really is.
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- 75 *Global Rivalries*, pp. 356–7 and p. 353, table 10.2. Sakwa, 'Putin and the oligarchs', pp. 187–90; Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook', p. 5.
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- 79 Zeyno Baran, 'EU energy security: time to end Russian leverage'. *The Washington Quarterly*, 30 (4) 2007, p. 139.
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- 81 Baran, *Security Aspects of the South Stream Project*, pp. 7 and 18.
- 82 Leslie Elliott Armijo, 'The BRICs countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as analytical category: mirage or insight?' *Asian Perspective*, 31 (4) 2007, p. 9. BRICS with a capital S refers to the group plus South Africa, otherwise to the first four.
- 83 Baran, *Security Aspects of the South Stream Project*, p. 26.
- 84 Cited in Garibaldi, 'NATO and European energy security', p. 4, and in Baran, *Security Aspects of the South Stream Project*, p. 30. Garibaldi at the time was working for the American Enterprise Institute; Zeyno Baran is director of the Center for Eurasian Policy at the Hudson Institute, both far-right institutions.
- 85 Peter Gowan, 'Crisis in the heartland: consequences of the new Wall Street system'. *New Left Review*, 2nd series (55) 2009, p. 9, emphasis added.
- 86 Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit*, p. 69.
- 87 Gowan, 'Crisis in the heartland', p. 9.
- 88 Raúl Delgado Wise and David T. Martin, 'The political economy of global labour arbitrage'. In Kees van der Pijl, ed., *Handbook of the International Political Economy of Production*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015, p. 70. The resulting human type figures in the novels of Michel Houellebecq, see Shlomo Sand, *La fin de l'intellectuel français? De Zola à Houellebecq* [trans. M. Bilis]. Paris: La Découverte, 2016, pp. 207–22.
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- 90 Christopher Rude, 'The role of financial discipline in imperial strategy'. In L. Panitch and M. Konings, eds, *American Empire and the Political Economy of Global Finance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 211 and 199, respectively.
- 91 Antonio Gramsci, passage from the *Notes on Machiavelli*, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 80n49. See *Dizionario Gramsciano 1926–1937* [ed. Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza]. Rome: Carocci, 2009, p. 167, 'corruzione'.
- 92 See Peter Newell, *Globalization and the Environment: Capitalism, Ecology and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, especially the chapter 'Global finance and the environment: gambling on green'.
- 93 Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, p. 230.
- 94 Dan Briody, *The Iron Triangle: Inside the Secret World of the Carlyle Group* [foreword C. Byron]. Hoboken: John Wiley, 2003, p. 21 and *passim*.
- 95 Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, pp. 235–6; and my *Global Rivalries*, p. 255n. The Yes camp in the Dutch referendum campaign on the EU Association Treaty with Ukraine also received a €200,000 donation from Soros in March 2016. NOS, 'Amerikaanse miljardair sponsort "ja"-campagne Oekraïne-referendum', 22 January 2016 (online).
- 96 Originally an Austrian savings bank, Erste Bank is currently the majority owner of the largest banks in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, of the second largest bank in Hungary, the third largest in Croatia, etc. *Erste Bank AG*, 'Expansion in central and eastern Europe', n.d. (online); *Open Society Foundation*, 'European Advisory Board', n.d. (online).
- 97 I have documented this in *The Discipline of Western Supremacy*. Vol. III of *Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy*. London: Pluto, 2014, pp. 214–19. See also William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

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- 99 These émigré Westernisers included, as Chris de Ploeg documents, the president of independent Estonia, T.H. Ilves, who in the United States worked for the anti-Soviet propaganda channel, Radio Free Europe; Lithuanian President V. Adamkus, also a US citizen for three decades, mostly as a military intelligence officer; and the president of Latvia, Vaira Vīke-Freiberga, who grew up in Canada. De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 281.
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- 109 The 'young professionals' included several who had been educated in Britain or the United States, and students from the three Caucasus countries (and a few from Ukraine), knew each other from prior colour revolutions.
- 110 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 55.
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- 112 Cited in Hyland and Marsden, 'Danger grows of NATO-Russian clash'; Florence Mardirossian, 'Géorgie-Russie, les enjeux de la crise'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2008. *Archives 1954–2012* [CD-ROM edn].
- 113 De Borchgrave, 'Commentary: Israel of the Caucasus'.
- 114 Hyland and Marsden, 'Danger grows of NATO-Russian clash'.
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- 116 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 55, 47; the port of Feodosia on the eastern shore of Crimea has also been leased to Russia under the same agreement, Edouard Pflimlin, 'Ukraine, une société bloquée: paix à l'extérieur, tensions à l'intérieur'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1998. *Archives 1954–2012* [CD-ROM edn].
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- 118 On the notion of 'constitutionalising' market democracy see Stephen Gill, 'European governance and new constitutionalism: economic and monetary union and alternatives to disciplinary neoliberalism in Europe'. *New Political Economy*, 3 (1) 1998, pp. 5–26.
- 119 Thomas Schreiber, 'Le rêve américain de la "nouvelle Europe"': Depuis la guerre froide jusqu'à l'élargissement de l'union'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2004. Pascual details from *Wikipedia*, 'Carlos Pascual'.

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- 123 Di Muzio, 'The "art" of colonisation', pp. 517–18.
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- 125 Nazemroaya, *The Globalization of NATO*, p. 29.
- 126 Ray Silvius, 'Understanding Eurasian integration and contestation in the post-Soviet conjuncture: lessons from geopolitical economy and critical historicism'. In Radhika Desai, ed., *Theoretical Engagements in Geopolitical Economy* [Research in Political Economy, vol. 30A]. Bingley: Emerald, 2015, p. 246.
- 127 Cited in Baran, *Security Aspects of the South Stream Project*, p. 12.
- 128 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 281; Volodymyr Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures' [interview]. *New Left Review*, 2nd series (87) 2014, p. 15n. On Bildt and Palme, see my *Global Rivalries*, pp. 253 and 240–1, respectively.
- 129 Cited in Julien Verceuil, 'Aide russe ou plan du FMI, Kiev acculé par ses bienfaiteurs: Aux racines économiques du conflit ukrainien'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2014, emphasis added.
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- 131 Elena A. Korosteleva, 'Eastern partnership and the Eurasian Union: bringing "the political" back in the eastern region'. *European Politics and Society*, 17 (supl.) 2016, pp. 67–81; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 36–7.
- 132 Cited in Hyland and Marsden, 'Danger grows of NATO-Russian clash'.
- 133 Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, rev. edn. London: Atlantic Books, 2004 [2003], pp. 59–61, for the hitherto civilian EU profile.
- 134 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 30.
- 135 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 55 and 41, respectively.
- 136 Mike Davis, 'Nuclear imperialism and extended deterrence'. In *New Left Review*, ed., *Exterminism and Cold War*. London: Verso, 1982.
- 137 Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'The rise of U.S. nuclear primacy'. *Foreign Affairs*, 85 (2) 2006, pp. 43, 50.
- 138 Lieber and Press, 'The rise of U.S. nuclear strategy', p. 52.
- 139 David Taylor and Ben Hoyle, 'US starts \$1 trillion upgrade to Cold War nuclear arsenal'. *The Times*, 15 November 2014, p. 30.
- 140 Alastair Crooke, 'Pushing Russia towards war'. *Consortium News*, 20 May 2016 (online). Adriel Kasonta and Richard Sakwa, 'Taking the war out of Warsaw'. *AntiWar.com*, 7 July 2016 (online).

Divided Ukraine

Western advance into the former Soviet space drew several former republics of the USSR into the NATO sphere of influence. In 1994, Ukraine joined the Partnership for Peace, the waiting room for membership of the Atlantic Alliance and also became a member of the GUAM group along with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. American democracy promotion contributed to colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004 and, despite repeated warnings from Moscow that it would no longer tolerate NATO adventures on its borders, encouraged Georgia's Saakashvili to try and recapture South Ossetia by force in 2008. Although their NATO membership had still been put on hold by Franco-German objections, both Ukraine and Georgia were invited to the EU's Eastern Partnership, a barely disguised Atlantic project to keep them from joining Russia's Eurasian Union.

For Ukraine, the risks of this course were not confined to its external relations with Russia, but extended to its own unity. Since the 1920s, the Ukrainian Soviet republic comprised two main ethno-political formations, with a tail of smaller nationalities. While constructing national unity remained a large but not impossible task, the forced choice between East and West was bound to break the fragile entity. As former Czech President Václav Klaus told the British House of Lords EU Committee, Ukraine is a 'heterogeneous, divided country, and ... *an attempt to forcefully and artificially change its geopolitical orientation would inevitably result in its break-up, if not its destruction*'.¹

In this chapter we look at the fault-lines that led to the country's eventual fracturing and the civil war. I first profile the ultra-nationalist legacy with which post-1991 Ukrainian nation-building became conflated, setting its face against its real diversity. The forces associated with this legacy would re-emerge when they hijacked the Maidan protest movement and seized power in Kiev in February 2014. Until that time, political processes held Ukrainian nationalism and Russian-Ukrainian federalism in balance.

Second, we turn to the capitalist oligarchy that appropriated post-communist Ukraine's wealth by privatising old Soviet centres of power. Under the patronage of President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004) this oligarchy, uneasily perched on the fault-line between eastern and western Ukraine, rose to become the controlling force in the country. Ukraine's gas networks constituted the single most important source of private enrichment; the nominally state-owned, but privately controlled and bitterly contested, Naftogaz Ukrainiy was the main prize. From these struggles the oligarchs associated with

Russian-Ukrainian federalism emerged as the dominant economic force. Its two main figures were the then-owner of one-quarter of Ukraine's capital assets, Rinat Akhmetov, and the long-time associate of Russia's Gazprom in Ukraine, Dmytro Firtash. Their front man in politics was the president deposed in 2014, Viktor Yanukovych. Ten years earlier, Yanukovych and his backers still overplayed their hand and, by committing vote fraud, provoked the 'Orange Revolution'. That event made clear that the initially prominent anti-Russian oligarchs such as the 'gas princess', Yuliya Tymoshenko, could interrupt the continuing ascent of the Russian-Ukrainian federalist bloc only by attaching themselves to popular revolts against oligarchic plunder – a lesson for 2014.

In the concluding part of the chapter I look at how Ukraine is situated in the economic balance between the liberal West and the Eurasian/BRICS contender bloc and identify the anti-Russian oligarchs who sought to align Ukraine with the EU and NATO. They included Kuchma's son-in-law, the gas pipeline magnate, Viktor Pinchuk, interlocked with the Atlantic ruling class through his Yalta European Strategy ('YES') network; Ihor Kolomoisky of the Privat Group, which combines banking, energy and airline interests; as well as a host of lesser oligarchs in the food and agricultural sectors, including the future president, Petro Poroshenko, 'the chocolate king'.

The two Ukraines and the dynamics of independence

Ukraine has been characterised as a 'Cossack anarcho-democratic semi-state' with a long tradition of religious and ethnic diversity, a developed civic sense and distrust of power, evident in the two Maidan insurrections (2004 and 2013–14).² Its name means 'borderland' and its Cossack inhabitants were warriors guarding the Russian empire's southern 'marches', who had adopted the nomadic social organisation of their enemies. The westernmost part, Galicia, had in turn been a frontier province of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Imperial frontier lands have long been zones of dense interaction and mutual adaptation between settled imperial cores and nomadic elements on their perimeter. They enjoy definite advantages over the former; and imperial ruling groups often originated on the frontier, as in Rome, China or elsewhere.³ Hence, frontier zones cannot be considered mere dependencies ('internal colonies'), and neither can Ukraine.⁴ Even as a Soviet republic, Ukraine was far from marginal. Crucially, after the civil war that ended in 1922, an area of southern Russia as large as the original rump-Ukraine was added to the Ukrainian Soviet republic.⁵ The industrialisation of this new, southern and eastern Ukraine pushed up the percentage of Russians there and, in 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev added Crimea to Ukraine, supposedly as a reward for the republic's loyalty in the Second World War. Khrushchev made his career in Ukraine; his successor, Leonid Brezhnev, had been party secretary of the province (oblast) of Zaporozhe in the east, a showcase of Stalinist industrialisation, whilst eastern Ukrainian party cadre dominated the central party hierarchy in Moscow. In turn, more than half of the Ukrainian Communist Party elite hailed from the key centre of Dnepropetrovsk.⁶

On the eve of the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainians and Russians accounted for 72 and 22 per cent of the population of Ukraine, respectively. In the first census after independence, in 2001, Russians had declined by 5 percentage points; three-quarters of the

Jews who had survived the genocide by the Nazis and Ukrainian fascists had emigrated in the 1970s, pushing down their share to 0.9 per cent.⁷

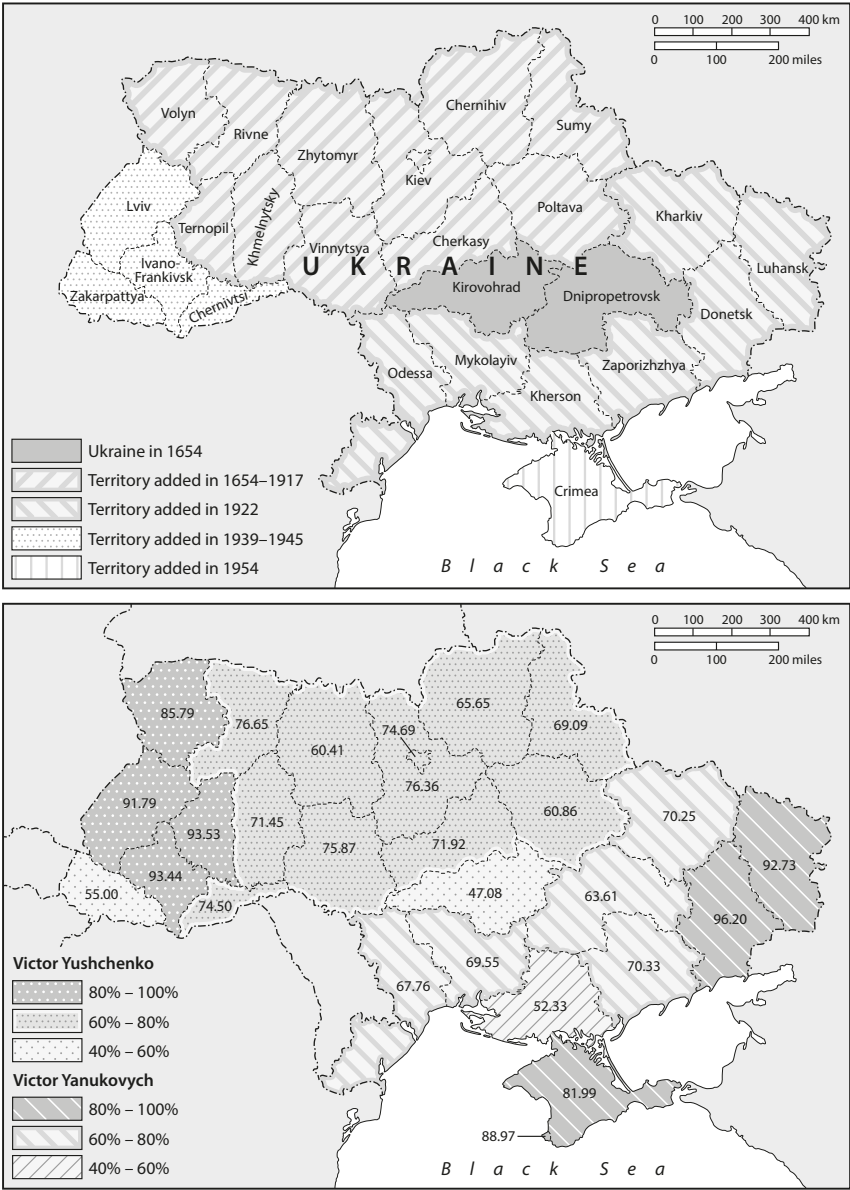
The Soviet experience left behind complicated linguistic loyalties, too. Practically all educated Ukrainians speak Russian (the language of education and media, including internet), and many ethnic Ukrainians speak Russian as their first language. Although an apparently overwhelming majority gave Ukrainian as their mother tongue in surveys (83 per cent in 1996), only half used it on a regular basis.⁸ People in the east tend not to speak Ukrainian at all. Hence language was a weak unifying force. Probably for lack of another; however, post-independence governments pushed for linguistic 'national' unity, claiming that the country would not hold together if concessions were made to the country's 'Russians' too soon.⁹ Crimea, a Russian-majority area, never reconciled itself with its place in an independent Ukraine. It voted against inclusion in 1991, declared independence in May 1992, and enjoyed a separate status until it definitively broke away in 2014. Meanwhile, the Russian-Ukrainian east and south accommodated to their new nationality through *federalism*. Federalism allows provinces to administer their own education and other cultural domains, whilst foreign policy, defence and the national economy remain the preserve of the centre. Russia is a federation, as are the United States, Canada, Germany and many other states.

Figure 2.1 shows how the fault-lines inherited from the enlargements of 1922 and 1954 remained pertinent in nation-wide elections after independence. The areas in which the federalist, Viktor Yanukovich obtained majorities in presidential elections in 2004 and 2010, almost exactly coincide with the areas added in 1922 and 1954; the others went to the nationalists, Viktor Yushchenko and Yuliya Tymoshenko, respectively. The map in Figure 2.1 gives the pattern for 2004.

Hence, no 'Russian invasion' was necessary for the east and south of the country to resist and even take up arms following the seizure of power by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists in February 2014. Russian or Russian-speaking Ukrainians, effectively half of the country, already lived there. 'For many in eastern and southern Ukraine, including the historical regions of Donbass, Novorossiya, Slobozhanshchina, and Crimea, being Ukrainian means being part of a distinct nation that lives in close harmony with Russia', writes Nicolai Petro. 'Although they do not wish to join Russia, neither do they wish to be forced to forsake Russian culture in order to be considered loyal Ukrainians.'¹⁰

It is important to recall that, as late as October 1989, only a minority (20.6 per cent) of the electorate favoured Ukrainian self-determination. It took two coups in Russia in 1991 – the half-hearted conservative one and Boris Yeltsin's – as well as nationalist propaganda concerning the alleged subsidies wealthy Ukraine had been providing to Moscow, before Ukrainians voted 90.3 per cent in favour of independence.¹¹ Once lit, the fires of nationalism would later be directed at those considered less loyal, framed as foreigners, a fifth column, and so on.

Ukraine's striving for mono-lingual unity set it apart from Russia, which of necessity continued to treat its different ethnic groups in the spirit of Soviet nationality policy, built on the twin foundations of internationalism and autonomy, even after the centralising Putin came to power.¹² Ukraine's idea of an ethnic nation bore fruit in February 2014 when the nationalist theme of a blood tie holding the people together, the *ius sanguinis*,



2.1 The two Ukraines. Top: Soviet-era enlargements in 1922 and 1954. Bottom: federalist majorities in the 2004 presidential election.

in which the status of ‘foreign’ elements is problematic, if not illegitimate, came into its own.

The different Russian and Ukrainian perspectives on how the state relates to nationality have given rise to conflicting views on the status of the former Soviet republics in

this respect. A Chatham House report speaks of 'a latent conflict of interests between the West and Russia over the status of the other 14 post-Soviet newly independent states'. The West sees these states as sovereign, 'free to determine their own affiliations without threat or coercion'; in Russia, a different view obtains, in which

These states are to a greater or lesser extent historically part of Russia, acquired independence accidentally rather than through a formal settlement of the post-Cold War order; are intimately linked to Russia through myriad personal and economic connections, and form Russia's security perimeter. They must therefore be recognised as within Russia's 'sphere of strategic interests', and must not be permitted to act in ways or form affiliations that are deemed to be contrary to Russia's strategic interests.¹³

The 25 million or so Russians who found themselves living in the 14 new post-Soviet states other than Russia, and the role of the Russian language across all of them, from Moscow's vantage point ruled out negating these legacies of the USSR in the name of state sovereignty; whereas for the West, an anti-Russian option was included in the very notion of sovereignty. Ukraine's rulers adhered to the latter vision. It implied that the inhabitants of the country's eastern and southern half had minority status at best.

Antecedents of Ukrainian nationalism

Ukrainian nationalism emerged in a long history of struggle against Poland, Russia and the Soviet Union. For historical reasons having to do with the discrimination Jewish communities faced after the demise of the Khazar empire (which had adopted Judaism), it also contains a powerful anti-Jewish tradition, mobilised against the large concentration of Jews in Ukraine, south Russia and Poland.¹⁴

When the Russian empire collapsed in 1917, German troops occupied Kiev. Under their auspices an anti-Bolshevik government was established, which collapsed when the Germans withdrew and the western region of Ukraine was assigned to Poland in 1919. Ukrainians were now the largest minority in Poland (four million) and anti-Polish feeling was only partly overcome by a shared anti-Jewish sentiment. On this basis, the leader of the Ukrainian nationalists, Simon Petlura, agreed with the Polish strongman, Pilsudski, that the Ukrainians of Polish Galicia would eventually become part of an independent state should Soviet Ukraine break away from the USSR.¹⁵ Initially, the Bolsheviks encouraged Ukrainian national identity and language, like the cultures of the other Soviet nationalities, also as a shortcut to the revolution's need for a literate cadre. However, the breakneck industrialisation under the Five-Year Plans, enabled by forced collectivisation of agriculture with its millions of deaths across Soviet Ukraine and south Russia, entailed centralism and the privileged use of Russian.¹⁶

The Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was established in Vienna in 1929. Like all movements longing to restore an imaginary glorious past, it floated fascist themes such as national rebirth, restoring the country's 'health', elitism and military values.¹⁷ In 1933, Stepan Bandera became its head. He led the most radical wing, OUN-B, which welcomed the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 in the hope that Hitler would establish an independent Ukraine. The Nazis did recruit a Waffen-SS division in

the Galicia region of western Ukraine and OUN operatives committed unspeakable crimes against Poles, Jews, communists and suspected Soviet agents, killing hundreds of thousands. However, the Germans mistrusted Bandera, who spent most of the war in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He was only released in 1944, when the Nazis hoped to use UPA, the military wing of OUN-B, against the Red Army's onslaught. Ukrainian nationalist resistance continued as a partisan war after the German collapse.¹⁸

In 1946, Allied cooperation in the prosecution of Nazi war criminals broke down and OUN/UPA and other collaborationist armed groups were recruited into the Western Cold War line-up.¹⁹ The Committee of Subjugated Nations, formed in 1943 by the Nazis, was reconstituted as the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN) under US auspices in 1946. Ukrainian fascists were a prominent component. Their notorious wartime police chief, Mykola Lebed, was brought to the United States to help build a Ukrainian government in exile, whilst the survivors of the Galicia SS division and their families were helped to new homes in Canada, Britain and the United States.²⁰ Back in the USSR, covert operations by underground guerrillas in non-Russian and Muslim areas scored occasional successes. Their actions had the additional advantage of keeping the repressive aspects of Soviet state power in full view. In Ukraine, according to Frank Wisner, the head of US covert operations, by 1951 the OUN/UPA had eliminated tens of thousands of Red Army and Soviet police and party cadre.²¹

By then, armed resistance in the Soviet frontier areas had largely been broken. Yet a vengeful émigré constituency continued to prepare for better times. It became a prominent component in the Captive Nations Committee, which in 1959 won official recognition when the US Congress instituted a Captive Nations Week; here 'nations' included even entities created by the Nazis, allegedly held captive by 'Russia'. The second wife of Viktor Yushchenko (Ukraine's president after the Orange Revolution of 2004) was the chairperson of the Captive Nations Committee in the United States. Her husband would eventually rehabilitate Bandera in 2010, a move immediately rescinded by Viktor Yanukovich when he was elected president.²² For 'Western Ukraine's heroes are eastern Ukraine's traitors'.²³

Transformation of the state class and political parties

Independent Ukraine emerged relatively slowly from the Soviet past. The republic's Communist Party leader, Leonid Kravchuk, remained in office as president until 1994. The party cadre structure was transformed into a *neo-nomenklatura* (the vetted, eligible functionaries of Soviet times), concentrated in Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk, with their political positions and connections remaining largely intact. The state class structure was reproduced at the lower levels of the bureaucracy as well, and employment by the state even expanded. In the case of Zaporozhe (Ukrainian Zaporizhzhya), the number of officials in the municipal and provincial administrations more than doubled between 1990 and 1996. Hans van Zon and his co-authors characterise the emerging new system as quasi-'feudal', with a complicated structure of 'mutual horizontal dependencies, without a clear centre, but run by the same people'.²⁴ It should not come as a surprise that an estimated 30 per cent of Ukrainians as late as 2013 continued to favour

a planned economy over capitalism; and if a market economy were instituted, 40 to 45 per cent considered it necessary to combine it with a strong state role.²⁵

The party system also slowly evolved from its Soviet past, initially under the impetus of a resurgent nationalism. Kravchuk's political power base was a nationalist party, Rukh, which had begun to organise itself in the westernmost parts of Ukraine already in the 1980s. The party was not monolithically Ukrainian nationalist, but also encompassed a federalist strand.²⁶ Extreme Ukrainian nationalism was articulated by the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU), which stood in the tradition of Bandera and OUN. The SNPU was launched in Lviv in 1991 by Oleg Tyagnybok, Andriy Parubiy and others. It brandished the Nazi *Wolfsangel* (Wolf's Hook) sign and organised skinheads and football hooligans in its paramilitary wing, Patriot of Ukraine, led from 1998 to 2004 by Parubiy.²⁷ As we shall see, Parubiy led the Maidan armed groups in 2014 and became secretary of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), the body that oversees all military and intelligence activity, a post he held from the coup until three weeks after the downing of MH17. One of the extremist volunteer battalions fighting Russian-Ukrainian insurgents under his command, the Azov battalion, adopted the Wolf's Hook sign in its banner.

The alliance between Ukrainian nationalism and the Atlantic bloc, dating from the first Cold War, acquired a new quality after 1991. Some OUN émigrés in North America, the 'Galician cousins', began drifting back to Ukraine again, while others stayed behind to organise backing for Ukrainian nationalism against Russia. At the same time, OUN veterans and assorted nationalists constituted the Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA) alongside an armed wing, the Ukrainian People's Self-Defence (UNSO), one of the constituent Far Right formations in the country.²⁸

In 2004, the year of the Orange Revolution, SNPU was renamed *Svoboda* ('Freedom'). Parubiy left the party and Patriot of Ukraine to join Viktor Yushchenko's party, Our Ukraine. *Svoboda* remains anti-Semitic and anti-Russian, and is allied to other Far Right and neo-Nazi parties. Its leader, Oleg Tyagnybok, won a seat in parliament as a member of Our Ukraine. However, he was expelled by Yushchenko after a speech in which he praised the wartime genocide by the military wing of the OUN, whilst calling for the liberation of the country from the 'Moscovite-Jewish mafia'.²⁹ In a cable from the US embassy in Kiev published by WikiLeaks, UNA-UNSO was characterised as fascist. It was reported to have fought, from 1992 on, with Moldovan troops in Transnistria, on the side of Georgia against Abkhazia, with Chechens against Russia, and alongside Serbians in Kosovo, before supporting Yushchenko in the elections of 2004. Yushchenko in turn combined the posture of a neoliberal technocrat with involvement in Ukrainian Far Right nationalism.

At the other end of the spectrum, the post-Soviet parties included the Social-Democratic Party, originally established in 1990 and re-founded in April 1996 as SDPU(o), 'united'. It was led by Viktor Medvedchuk, the political leader of the initially powerful Kiev fraction of the oligarchy, head of Leonid Kuchma's presidential administration, and a confidant of the Russian leadership in Moscow – posts of diminishing importance after 2004.³⁰ Finally there was the Communist Party. It remained a powerful political force with around a quarter of the vote until the mid-1990s, after which it began to decline and, like Rukh, was condemned to opposition. The Communist Party was outlawed after the coup of 2014. Other parties, which emerged with the ascent of the oligarchs, will be discussed later.

The Ukrainian nation-state project

Kravchuk and, from 1994, Kuchma (whose knowledge of Ukrainian was in fact limited), adopted a policy of Ukrainisation to constitute a new nation, hoping to mobilise prevailing anti-Soviet, anti-Russian sentiment. Kravchuk believed that by concentrating on ethno-national unification, rather than economic reform, he would be able to neutralise the influence of the post-Soviet state class.³¹ Certainly Kuchma made gestures towards Russia in order to secure his standing with Russian-Ukrainian voters during elections, but in 1996 he signalled that Ukraine was seeking to bolster its independence relative to Russia by aligning itself with the West. 'We are not Switzerland', he said, referring to Ukraine's constitutional neutrality, 'NATO should not be closed to any state and we will cooperate with NATO'.³² The following year he signed an agreement for cooperating during crises situations, but now underlined that Ukraine had no intention of joining NATO. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), Ukraine joined GUAM in 1998 and, during the Kosovo crisis, blocked Russian supplies from getting through to Serbia.

The constitution of 1996 defined Ukraine as a unitary nation-state with a single language, Ukrainian, with Russian one of the minority languages. Salary rises for teaching staff were tied to shifting from Russian to Ukrainian and, in early 1997, the state university of Zaporozhe, for instance, abolished the faculty of Russian language and literature, transferring staff to other faculties and reducing the number of students. This relegation of Russian, the language of science and culture, to minority status led to widespread dissatisfaction.³³ Yet the West encouraged all such anti-Russian nationalist policies. Since Ukrainian had hardly developed as a modern language, the nationalist drive worked to deny Ukraine's real history, downgrade its cultural and information levels and turn Russian-speakers into a stigmatised minority.

Class formation and oligarchy

The privatisation of the Ukrainian economy, like those of other post-Soviet republics, entailed the formation of an oligarchy of billionaires and multimillionaires dividing the country's wealth among themselves. If the fascist antecedents of Ukrainian ultranationalism account for key aspects of the 2014 coup and the conduct of the subsequent civil war against Russian-Ukrainians with its massacres and war crimes, the oligarchs siding with the nationalists against their rivals from the Donbass lent the situation its material basis.

Anders Åslund, director of the Russian and Eurasian Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, one of the architects of the neoliberal capitalist 'transition' and a participant in the Round Tables of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA, see [Chapter 1](#)), joined the chorus of those justifying the oligarchy:

New owners became conspicuously rich ... [but] since their property rights were weak, the new entrepreneurs, commonly called oligarchs, reinsured their property rights by buying politicians, judges and other officials, what is called corruption or state capture.³⁴

Such justification demonstrated how central the oligarchs were to the West's project. Corruption, the 'insurance' of purchasing politicians and judges, Åslund expected,

will recede when substituted by legal protection of property rights and the formal separation of politics from economics, as had happened in the United States. Yet while the Populist movement and the Progressive regulatory drive tamed the robber barons in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century, no such thing has so far happened with respect to Ukraine's billionaires, nor was there a recentralisation of state power from above, as in Russia under Putin. Public discontent exploded in the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Maidan revolt ten years later; but since lesser oligarchs in both cases used the occasion to wrest power from the mightiest billionaires, neither event has dislodged the oligarchy as such.

Original accumulation under the auspices of the post-Soviet state class

The original dividing lines between the main fractions of the Ukrainian capitalist oligarchy reproduced the regional centres of Soviet power in Ukraine: Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk and the Donbass, with Donetsk its main node. Oligarchs from Dnepropetrovsk were the initially dominant force; the Kiev group briefly held the balance with the ascendant eastern oligarchs (during Kuchma's second term); whilst the Donetsk forces, represented in politics by Viktor Yanukovych, rose to prominence after 2002, provoking the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the seizure of power ten years later. By then, the anti-Russian oligarchs had aligned themselves with western Ukrainian nationalism, albeit never completely.³⁵

At the risk of over-schematising a complex and fluid situation, the main players in the oligarchy discussed in this chapter, and their political allies, are situated on the nationalist/federalist and Dnepropetrovsk-Donetsk scales (Figure 2.2).

The Kuchma presidency (1994 to 2004) incubated the transition from the post-Soviet neo-nomenklatura to the oligarchy. Kuchma had been a member of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the manager of Yuzhmash in Dnepropetrovsk, which produced Soviet intercontinental missiles. Prime minister under Kravchuk for one year; he proceeded to build his own party, uniting the aspiring capitalist class behind him. Some of Kuchma's early supporters, including several prime ministers, had to flee the country to escape prosecution for stealing. The most spectacular case was Pavlo Lazarenko's (prime minister in 1996–97): he fled to the United States in 1999 and was convicted for fraud there.³⁶ Initially, the new rich were mostly commodity traders, dealing in gas from Russia or Turkmenistan, for which Ukraine is the transit hub. One of the first crop of oligarchs, Ihor Bakai, famously declared in 1998 that 'all really rich people in Ukraine have made their money on gas'.³⁷

Lazarenko held various offices (governor of Dnepropetrovsk oblast, prime minister) and assisted the rise of another Dnepropetrovsk oligarch and eventually prime minister, Yuliya Tymoshenko. Like several other post-Soviet millionaires, Tymoshenko's career began in the Communist Youth, Komsomol, during Gorbachev's *Perestroika*. In 1991, Tymoshenko and her husband established KUB (Ukrainian Petrol Corporation), a company importing fuel and lubricants from Russia for the Ukrainian agricultural market. She then branched out into the gas distribution business, eventually earning the nickname 'gas princess'. Lazarenko helped Tymoshenko and KUB become, for a time, Ukraine's largest gas importers. Although she had been Lazarenko's business partner all

Politicians			
<i>Ukrainian nationalist</i>		<i>Federalist</i>	
Leonid Kravchuk	Leonid Kuchma		
	Pavlo Lazarenko		Viktor Yanukovych
Yuliya Tymoshenko	Ihor Bakaï*	Viktor Medvedchuk	Mykola Azarov
Viktor Yushchenko		Serhiy Lyovochkin	Yuriy Boyko*
Oligarchs (fractions)			
<i>Dnepropetrovsk/ Orange bloc</i>		<i>Kiev bloc/ Kuchma allies</i>	<i>Donetsk/ federalist bloc</i>
Yuliya Tymoshenko (YESU)		Viktor Medvedchuk	Rinat Akhmetov (I, SMC)
Viktor Pinchuk (4, Interpipe)		(media) Hrihori Surkis	Borys Kolesnikov (28, Ukrinvest)
Ihor Kolomoiskij (3, Privat)		Ihor Surkis (banks, football)	Sergey Taruta (15, ISD) Oleg Mkrtychan (16, ISD)
Henadiy Boholyubov (2, Privat)			Vitaliy Hayduk (25, ISD)
Konstantin Zhevago (5, Ferrexpo)	Ihor Bakaï* (Interhaz)		Andriy Verevskiy (17, Kernel)
Serhiy Tihipko (22, TAS)			
Petro Poroshenko (13, Ukrprominvest)			Dmytro Firtash (7, RUE)
Yuri Kosyuk (11, MHP)			

2.2 Main Dividing Lines in the Ukrainian Oligarchy under Kuchma.

*indicates heads of Naftogaz Ukrainiy.

along, Tymoshenko managed to escape Ukrainian and US prosecution until 2010, when Yanukovych was elected president.³⁸ Lazarenko and Tymoshenko early on established a link between the Dnepropetrovsk fraction of the oligarchy, which was at its most powerful when he was prime minister, and Ukrainian nationalism. In March 1994 they created the Hromada (Community) party, with Tymoshenko's signature braided hairstyle giving her the appearance of an Ukrainian maiden appreciated by nationalists. She was elected to parliament in 1996, still supporting Kuchma, who may have played a role in driving the popular Lazarenko, a potential rival, into exile.³⁹

These developments were mere preliminaries, however. The privatisation of the Ukrainian economy did not begin in earnest until the IMF gave a \$375 million systemic transformation facility loan in October 1994. Viktor Yushchenko, then head of the new National Bank of Ukraine, became the executor of the required reforms (whilst embezzling some of the IMF money entrusted to him). After the devaluation of the Ukrainian

currency, runaway inflation subsided from almost 5,000 per cent in 1993 to 10 per cent in 1997.⁴⁰ It also entailed a plunge in real wages and drastic price rises for bread, electricity, public transport and fuel, leading to widespread hunger, while trade liberalisation resulted in US grain surpluses and food aid being dumped on the Ukrainian market, undercutting local grain producers already facing rising costs of transportation and energy.⁴¹

Original appropriation and accumulation always involve violence and in the post-Soviet states the process combined criminal privatisation with capital mobility via offshore tax havens.⁴² It fitted into the predatory neoliberalism which by then was becoming the dominant format of capitalist rule in the West too. Given Ukraine's extensive gas pipeline network, distributing gas internally and on to Europe, the main prize was not only the gas but also the product chain connecting it to pipe production and ferrous metals.⁴³ When shock-therapy-induced inflation and debt defaults eclipsed the money economy and reduced trade to barter, trading companies emerged to manage this in sector-specific ways. Gas, for instance, was bartered for overpriced pipes, favouring pipe producers. Viktor Pinchuk, another of the Komsomol cohort, consolidated his gas pipe business in Cyprus-based Interpipe.⁴⁴

In 1994–95 Tymoshenko and Lazarenko brought Pinchuk on board in a venture importing Turkmen gas for distribution through the Ukrainian grid; the Tymoshenko-Lazarenko company, KUB, was restructured and re-registered as YESU (United Energy Systems of Ukraine). The patronage of Kuchma was a key factor in the new alliance (in 2002 Pinchuk would marry Kuchma's daughter) and Pinchuk effectively ran the gas-pipe-metal product chain with Tymoshenko and Lazarenko until the latter absconded to the United States. Also involved was Itera, a company domiciled in Florida and active in importing Turkmen gas into Ukraine under a licence from Russia's Gazprom. Dmytro Firtash, considered an associate of Gazprom and, by implication, linked to Russian influence in Ukraine, was the key figure in Itera.⁴⁵

Two more oligarchs from Dnepropetrovsk, Ihor Kolomoisky and Henadiy Boholyubov, also were early allies of Yuliya Tymoshenko. In 1992 the two men founded Privatbank, eventually the largest bank of Ukraine, to back up their proliferating business interests.⁴⁶ Kolomoisky, along with Pinchuk, would become the main winner of the 2014 seizure of power within the top bracket of the oligarchy.

Ukraine's crony capitalism is not just a matter of private wealth. It also operates through the hold the oligarchs have on nominal state monopolies; some of the most ferocious internecine struggles were about those, notably Naftogaz Ukrainiy. Naftogaz is a key example of a 'state-owned enterprise' holding in place 'a nonviable economy', terms used by the US State Department planning staff under Krasner and Pascual to identify the key target of economic regime change (see [Chapter 1](#)). However, Ukraine's home-grown predators have other priorities, which they enforce through strategic appointments allowing the diversion of profits. Until 2015, Kolomoisky's Privatbank owned 42 per cent of the Naftogaz Ukrainiy subsidiary, Uknafta. Via Boholyubov's role as chairman of the board, Uknafta was effectively controlled by Kolomoisky. The same construction was applied to another company majority-owned by Naftogaz Ukrainiy, Ukratnafta, which operates the largest and only functioning refinery of Ukraine at Kremenchuk.⁴⁷

Occasionally, neoliberal-inspired attempts to break up the oligarchic structure were undertaken but these remained unsuccessful. Thus after Lazarenko's dismissal as prime minister in 1997, a group of reformers led by Serhiy Tihipko, an oligarch banker and minister of economics at the time, sought to create a market economy but gave up after two years. Struggles over control of the public sector for private gain, and of Naftogaz in particular, were only resumed with fresh gusto.⁴⁸

Following Lazarenko's flight to the United States, Tymoshenko founded her ethnic-Ukrainian nationalist party, *Batkivshchyna* (Fatherland), whilst Kuchma moved closer to the ascendant Donbass oligarchs to ensure his re-election in 1999. These oligarchs were also interested in the gas supply business and Kuchma accommodated them by removing Tymoshenko's YESU from the gas market and devolved its assets, to Pinchuk among others, whilst Firtash, associated with Itera, also moved in. Now Tymoshenko reinvented herself as the champion of democracy and began to attack the president for his autocratic rule in the wake of 1995 constitutional changes investing new powers in the presidency. To gain time and amass the necessary resources to take on Kuchma, she even proposed postponing the presidential election, provoking the wrath of those in power, including an (unsuccessful) attempt to suspend her parliamentary immunity from prosecution.

In his first term, Kuchma was able to balance the different capitalist clans and, in so doing, presided over their continued rise in power. However, given that Ukraine's GDP declined steeply from \$81.5 billion to \$31.6 billion between 1990 and 1999, his public standing suffered.⁴⁹ He had to hire public opinion managers from Moscow, who had assisted Yeltsin in the Russian president's unlikely re-election in 1996. Sympathetic oligarchs (notably, Viktor Medvedchuk and Kuchma's son-in-law, Pinchuk) began buying up so many media outlets that 'oligarch' in public discourse became synonymous with media baron.⁵⁰ Thanks to help from these quarters, the death of two rival candidates – the former central banker, V. Hetman, was shot dead by a Donetsk gangster in 1998 and the spokesman of Rukh, V. Chornovil, died a year later in a suspicious car accident, allegedly organised by the minister of the interior, militia general Yuriy Kravchenko – and the split in the Rukh party, also organised by Kravchenko, Kuchma managed to defeat his Communist rival.⁵¹

After winning the election, Kuchma had to find ways of offsetting his rapidly declining popularity and cover his back in Dnepropetrovsk and the west of the country. He did so by appointing Yushchenko as prime minister and Tymoshenko as deputy prime minister with the portfolio for fuel and energy. Tymoshenko now began centralising the gas purchase in Naftogaz Ukrainiy and removing middlemen by direct agreements with Gazprom, but the struggles over control did not end there.⁵² The Dnepropetrovsk fraction was effectively disintegrating; the economically weak, but politically strongest fraction of the oligarchy, the Kiev group, came to occupy the commanding heights instead, at least until 2002. Viktor Medvedchuk, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, was head of the Presidential Administration in Kuchma's second term. He was one of the so-called 'Kiev Seven' that also included the Surkis brothers, Hrihoriy and Ihor (the owner of Dynamo Kiev football club). As noted, Medvedchuk was close to the Russian leaders, and relations between Kiev and Moscow improved in this period.⁵³

Discontent with the rapacious oligarchy amid economic stagnation and rising poverty boiled over when tapes recorded in Kuchma's office by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko were made public in November 2000. On these tapes Kuchma was heard to suggest that the journalist, Heorhiy Gongadze, who had been reporting on the business deals of Kuchma's circle, be deported to his native Georgia: 'The Chechens need to steal him and throw him away.' Gongadze had been kidnapped the previous September and his decapitated body was found near Kiev two months later, with signs of gruesome torture.⁵⁴ It was later revealed that Interior Minister Kravchenko had ordered a General Pukach to abduct Gongadze and assassinate him. Pukach confessed in court; Kravchenko himself was killed the night before giving testimony in March 2005. The scandal, 'Kuchmagate', sparked mass protests against the government and demands for the president's resignation. Pinchuk's media had to go in all guns blazing to defend his father-in-law's reputation.⁵⁵

The Melnychenko tapes also give an insight into how the oligarchy divided Ukraine's wealth among themselves. On one tape, Mykola Azarov, head of the Tax Inspection Agency (and later, Yanukovych's prime minister), is heard telling Kuchma that he has discovered that the aforementioned Ihor Bakai, then head of Naftogaz Ukrainiy, embezzled at least one hundred million US dollars. Azarov then explains that he told Bakai to remove all traces of this. Kuchma is heard agreeing and adding that he himself told Bakai, 'we will not protect your ass forever'.⁵⁶ Yet Kuchmagate did not bring the oligarchs' pillaging under control. In fact the oligarchic grip on government was made more complete when Kuchma accommodated the rival Donetsk fraction by appointing its political front man, Viktor Yanukovych, as prime minister:

Until he sought asylum in the United States, Melnychenko was an officer of the intelligence service of independent Ukraine, SBU, an institution whose criminal operations, according to Misha Glenny, 'provided the super-glue for the fusion between state power and the oligarchy'.⁵⁷ Through the different regime changes the service would remain a hotbed of crime and corruption, including art theft. Valentin Nalivaychenko, head the SBU after the Orange Revolution until fired by Yanukovych, reinstated after the coup, and fired again in June 2015, had been caught smuggling antiquities when still a diplomat; the service would be involved in other spectacular art heists later. In spite of the fact that the SBU was also accused of systematic torture by the UN, it would effectively be allowed to take the lead in the criminal investigation of the disaster with Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, as will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#).⁵⁸

From Dnepropetrovsk to Donetsk primacy

From late 2002, the oligarchy was no longer intermittently represented in cabinet, but imposed itself on the government as such. The transition was made complete by the ascent of the Donetsk fraction.⁵⁹ From now on, struggles within the oligarchy increasingly took the form of attempts by the lesser oligarchs, those of Dnepropetrovsk or from the west country, to attach themselves to popular discontent to dislodge their rivals: first in the 'Orange Revolution' of 2004 and eventually in the Maidan uprising followed by the armed coup in February 2014.

Privatisations in the Donbass relied far more on violent crime than elsewhere in the country, where they were primarily a matter of fraud and embezzlement. In a sign of the violent nature of original accumulation, crime in Ukraine rose by a factor of two-and-a-half between 1988 and 1997; the overall murder rate rose from 9 per 100,000 in 1990 to 21 in 1995. However, in Donetsk alone, 55 ordered murders happened in 1991, rising to 5–6 per week in 1992.⁶⁰ If Jews were prominent in the original Dnepropetrovsk fraction (Lazarenko, Pinchuk, Kolomoisky and several others), in the Donbass, it was Tatars. Akhat Brahın ('Alec the Greek') and his sidekick, Rinat Akhmetov, emerged as the winners in the first round. In 1995, following a series of murders that had augmented their joint business empire, Akhat Brahın was himself blown up in his VIP box in a football stadium, leaving Akhmetov as the main owner. After adding more assets in 1995 and 1996 in the wake of further assassinations, Akhmetov consolidated the whole raft of companies into System Capital Management (SCM).⁶¹ SCM controlled the largest slices of Ukraine's coal and steel industries and comprised around one-quarter of Ukraine's economy, making Akhmetov the country's richest man. SCM is domiciled in Cyprus, the Metinvest finance company in The Hague, the Netherlands, and besides, Akhmetov owns offices in London and Geneva.⁶²

Unlike the Dnepropetrovsk or Kiev fractions, which crystallised around post-Soviet state class figures, the Donetsk capitalists needed to recruit new politicians who could win elections for them. After the assassination of Akhat Brahın, Akhmetov and his sidekick, Borys Kolesnikov, selected Viktor Yanukovych for that role. The rise of Yanukovych owes much to his Soviet-era incarceration for violent crime, during which time he became acquainted with the security sector running the prisons. Upon his release, he displayed remarkable administrative talents and rose to become the head of coal transport (key in two of the three main product chains in Ukraine), in which capacity he became close to Akhmetov and Kolesnikov. They had him appointed governor of Donetsk oblast in 1996.⁶³ The Donetsk fraction's party was the 'Inter-regional Bloc for Reforms', launched late 1993 and formally registered at the end of 1995. It was the precursor of the federalist Party of Regions that would remain in power until removed by the coup of February 2014.⁶⁴

One further reason why the formation of a Donetsk capital fraction was delayed compared to the others, was the close integration of eastern heavy industry in the economy of the former USSR. As Yuliya Yurchenko notes, 69 per cent of industrial enterprises in the Donetsk-Lugansk-Dnepropetrovsk-Zaporozhe area operated under the auspices of all-Union ministries, notably, defence; against 56 per cent for Ukraine as a whole.⁶⁵ To recover from the disconnection from Russia and revive heavy industry, energy was key, but this was under control of Tymoshenko and Lazarenko. The success of any major Donbass industrial operation, now that the command economy no longer offered protection, therefore depended on cheap power; because energy use, for instance in steel production, was twice as high as in modern mills in the West.⁶⁶

Already in 1995, Donetsk forces responded to the establishment of Lazarenko's and Tymoshenko's YESU by setting up the Industrial Union of the Donbass (ISD). Its head was a crony of Akhmetov's, Yevhen Shcherban, who had risen through the ranks of the Brahın-Akhmetov gang. He was assassinated along with other Donetsk oligarchs

in mid-1996, after a failed attempt on Lazarenko's life.⁶⁷ Even so, to placate Donetsk interests, Lazarenko, prime minister at the time, appointed Yanukovych to a powerful position in the regional administration. 'A year later, in 1997, Yanukovych was running the region', writes Sergii Leshchenko. 'In the five years that followed, the Akhmetov clan built up reserves of financial and political power under Yanukovych's patronage.'⁶⁸ Soon after Lazarenko's resignation in 1997, ISD, now run by Akhmetov's lieutenants, Sergey Taruta and Oleg Mkrtychan, controlled some 80 per cent of the Donetsk oblast gas market, very nearly removing YESU from it.⁶⁹

The resurrection of the strong state in Russia under Vladimir Putin also had repercussions for the gas supply to Ukraine. As we saw, Putin's rise was premised on a clampdown on oligarchs resisting his state-capitalist turn. Putin also replaced Rem Viyakhirev at the head of Gazprom with his former KGB colleague, Alexei Miller, and this move resonated in Ukraine. After Lazarenko's flight to the United States in 1999, Yuliya Tymoshenko and her husband became the target of fraud cases over their role in YESU. In 2001, she was forced to resign again as deputy prime minister, losing control over the state monopoly, Naftogaz Ukrainiy, as a result. The assets of YESU were re-privatised, ending up in Akhmetov's SCM in 2002–3.⁷⁰

Gazprom now also removed Florida-based Itera as the intermediary for its supplies to Ukraine, replacing it with EuralTransGaz (ETG) in 2002. ETG was granted the monopoly of the gas trade between Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukrainiy, both state-owned, but as we saw in our discussion of Naftogaz, privately controlled. ETG was set up as an off-shore operation on behalf of Gazprom and domiciled in a small Hungarian village with an operetta cast of nominal owners.⁷¹ However, when it emerged that ETG was merely a huge money-laundering operation, Gazprom removed it again from the gas trade with Ukraine, replacing it in 2004 with RosUkrEnergo, a joint venture of Gazprom and Centragas Holding. Firtash now transferred his Itera assets to Centragas (another off-shore operation, this time in Austria); with his close associate, the then head of Naftogaz Ukrainiy, Yuriy Boyko, and Kuchma's adviser, Serhiy Lyovochkin, he now effectively controlled the Ukrainian gas supply.⁷² In November 2004, Yanukovych, in his last days in office as prime minister under Kuchma, signed a decree giving RosUkrEnergo the monopoly of the gas trade in Ukraine.⁷³

Firtash's business interests, according to Slawomir Matuszak, are not easily traceable (in the way that Akhmetov's or Pinchuk's are); most probably he represents Russian capital. RosUkrEnergo and the financial group emerging from it, RUE, are 'believed to be the most pro-Russian group inside the Ukrainian political and business elite since its representatives have lobbied for Russian interests on numerous occasions'.⁷⁴ This is significant given that in the run-up to the Vilnius EU summit in November 2013, the United States exerted maximum pressure on Firtash to make Yanukovych sign the EU Association Agreement, imposing and then lifting US extradition proceedings against the oligarch, who then resided in Vienna.

In 2004, the ascent of the Donetsk fraction was briefly interrupted by the Orange Revolution, which occurred after it emerged that the presidential election contest between Yushchenko and Yanukovych was rigged. As noted, for the anti-Russian and pro-Western oligarchs of Ukraine and the political formations under their control the only chance to block the ascent of the federalist forces based in the Russian-Ukrainian south

and east and backed by the powerful Donetsk bloc and Firtash's RosUkrEnergo, was to try and attach themselves to an outbreak of political discontent and recapture state power that way. That was the scenario that first played out in the Orange Revolution.

Disgust with the criminal ways of the ruling clique already helped Yushchenko's Our Ukraine in the parliamentary elections of 2002 (it won 24 per cent of the vote, gaining 111 seats). Yet he too was backed by oligarchs, including the future civil war president, Petro Poroshenko, among others. Nevertheless Yanukovich was appointed prime minister, since he too did well and behind him stood Akhmetov. By 2004, however, all the big oligarchs feared that the neoliberal reforms espoused by Yushchenko would harm their interests and they hesitated to give him their full backing in the race for president. Even Kolomoisky, with his powerful Glavred media conglomerate, kept aloof in the campaign. Kuchma, too, endorsed Yanukovich, not out of enthusiasm, but for the same reasons as the oligarchy and to ensure that he himself would not be prosecuted over Kuchmagate.⁷⁵

The presidential campaign in 2004 was fought with the weapons the oligarchs' criminal henchmen had honed. Here Donetsk was in a class of its own. Yushchenko had to campaign with his face disfigured by a poison attack, whilst Yanukovich got his initial victory by vote fraud. In the standard opening move of all 'colour revolutions', two NGOs contested the outcome on the basis of exit polls. In this case, vote-rigging was duly established and so was the complicity of the Electoral Commission. Yuliya Tymoshenko called out her supporters in protest and half a million gathered at Maidan Square in Kiev under the auspices of the *Pora* ('Enough') movement. When it appeared that force was the only way to suppress the protests and enforce a Yanukovich victory, some Donbass oligarchs actually deserted from the Yanukovich camp, notably the men behind ISD, Taruta and Mkrchan.

Ukrainian fault-lines and the East–West dilemma

The Donetsk bloc continued its ascent but the oligarchy was subject to centrifugal tendencies which interacted with the west–east, and in terms of capitalist clans, Dnepropetrovsk–Donetsk fault-lines. These rivalries, writes Yuliya Yurchenko, 'became the main cause of the protracted post-Orange Revolution political crisis that, among other developments, effectively led to the Party of Regions' victory in the Parliamentary election in 2007'.⁷⁶ From then on, the federalist bloc continued to consolidate its power, until dislodged when Yanukovich could no longer manage the triangular constellation with the EU and Russia in 2013–14.

The Orange Revolution was characterised as a 'revolt of the millionaires against the billionaires',⁷⁷ and upon his installation as president, Yushchenko promised to draw a sharp line between business and government. Even so, he placed several oligarchs in his first administration.⁷⁸ In January 2005, he appointed Tymoshenko as prime minister, as agreed before the elections. She launched a 'war on oligarchs', that is, the *other* oligarchs: Akhmetov and Pinchuk, who had purchased Krivorozhstal, Ukraine's largest metallurgical company, privatised in the closing months of Kuchma's presidency, for a mere \$800 million.⁷⁹ After the Orange revolt, the state repossessed it and sold it for \$4.2 billion to Lakshmi Mittal.⁸⁰ Kolesnikov, Akhmetov's sidekick, an advocate of Donbass

autonomy and, at the time, head of the Donetsk oblast council, was arrested for raiding one of the Orange supporters' business groups. The Privat Group of Kolomoisky and Boholyubov, on the other hand, which had financed Tymoshenko's electoral campaign, did not suffer.⁸¹

Neither did Poroshenko, a close family friend of Yushchenko's, although he did not become prime minister as he had expected. When Tymoshenko was chosen instead, it led to an enduring feud between them. The future president was made head of the National Security and Defence Council until dismissed in September 2005 over charges of corruption.⁸² Poroshenko obtained his assets through the privatisation of large Soviet enterprises, one named after Lenin (the shipbuilding factory *Leninskaya kuznitsa*), the other a confectionery factory named after Marx and rechristened, after the middle part of the new owner's name, Roshen, in 1996. They were consolidated in his holding, Ukrprominvest. Poroshenko is a typical political opportunist, or depending on one's point of view, centrist politician. He originally entered politics as an MP for the Social Democratic Party of Medvedchuk (Kiev fraction), was one of the founders of Yanukovych's federalist Party of Regions (Donetsk), before joining Yushchenko's nationalist 'Our Ukraine' bloc in 2001, supporting the then-prime minister's short-lived market reforms.⁸³ After playing a part in the Orange Revolution, he even served as Yushchenko's minister of foreign affairs in 2009–10, before returning to the camp of Yanukovych, who helped him to a (less prominent) ministerial post.⁸⁴

As it happened, Tymoshenko was not able to exploit her position as prime minister very much. She brought only one figure from her party into the government, A. Turchynov, the future coup president, who was appointed head of the notorious security service, SBU.⁸⁵ Animosity between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko soon boiled over too, but in the parliamentary elections of 2006 her party did better than the president's, whose following would dwindle to 5 per cent in the 2010 presidential election.

A coalition of the Party of Regions, Socialists and Communists then voted Yanukovych into office as prime minister again in August 2006, a post he would hold until the early parliamentary elections of 2007. This facilitated the renewed ascent of the Donetsk bloc and the Party of Regions. The main result of the elections of 2006 and 2007 was the eclipse of the Kiev fraction and its political vehicle, the Social Democratic Party of Medvedchuk.⁸⁶ Tymoshenko's bloc did well, landing her the office of prime minister again, with the support of Yushchenko. This time she remained in office until March 2010. She now resumed her campaign to gain control of the gas supply. Firtash's RosUkrEnergo, which had survived the Orange Revolution and strengthened its position under Yanukovych, was removed from the gas trade. In January 2009, this led to a damaging gas shut-down by Russia.⁸⁷

The United States was kept well informed about the oligarchic struggles and viewed the political entrenchment of the federalist bloc with grave mistrust. However, according to leaked cables, it also found Tymoshenko's populist campaign promises a cause for concern. Firtash now assumed the role of kingmaker, a role that would culminate in the Vienna deal in March 2014, when he conferred the presidency to Poroshenko and the mayoralty of Kiev to his only real challenger, the boxer, Vitaly Klitschko. Since Kuchma's proposals for strengthening the presidency had not become law, there was

more emphasis on parliamentary coalition building and Firtash was most adept in it. He also turned out to be the decisive force in the Party of Regions, more powerful than Akhmetov.⁸⁸ Firtash told the US ambassador, according to WikiLeaks cables, that he had prevented a coalition between Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party and the Party of Regions and instead worked for a Party of Regions coalition with Yushchenko's Our Ukraine.⁸⁹ This reinforced the Party of Regions, but also reflected concern among the oligarchs (and in the United States and Europe) that Tymoshenko might go too far in the anti-oligarch campaign.

By 2009–10, the Tymoshenko and Yushchenko wings of the Orange Revolution were openly at war with each other. Tymoshenko was supported by Kostyantyn Zhevago, the richest oligarch in her bloc, and a number of lesser figures; Yushchenko by Poroshenko. Other oligarchs, such as Kolomoisky and Boholyubov of the Privat Group, backed one side or another depending on which served them best. As support for Yushchenko declined further, some of his earlier supporters from the oligarchy crossed over to Tymoshenko, such as the owners of ISD, Vitaliy Hayduk and Taruta.⁹⁰ All in all, the 100 richest oligarchs now held the equivalent of 80 to 85 per cent of Ukraine's GDP.⁹¹

Between the heartland and a new contender bloc: Russia, the BRICS and the Eurasian Union

The break-up of the USSR wreaked economic havoc as the Soviet economy was disrupted by being divided among the successor states. After independence, Ukraine's economic relations with Russia deteriorated, slowly at first, more steeply after 1994. In that year, 68 per cent of Ukraine's exports went to former Soviet republics; by 1996, this had declined to 36 per cent. In spite of the announcement of a free trade zone of the CIS, trade barriers went up and, in late 1996, Kuchma complained of economic warfare when Russia slapped a 20 per cent levy on imports from Ukraine, to which Kiev responded in kind. Internally, the effect of being able to choose alternative markets in Europe set in motion chains of bankruptcies once Soviet-era suppliers were replaced by others.⁹²

The promise of a 40-million+ market had initially lured a number of Western corporations to Ukraine, including several large American companies, notably in light consumer goods. Already by 1996, however, companies such as Coca-Cola and Reynold's Tobacco had withdrawn and the US share of FDI went down from 26.5 per cent in 1997 to 6.7 per cent in 2007 (German capital climbed in the same period from 12.8 to 26.5 per cent). By that time, investment from Cyprus and other offshore locations had overtaken all others and stood at 34.6 per cent of FDI, mainly round-tripping by Ukrainian oligarchs.⁹³

Meanwhile, Bush-era unilateralism after 9/11 worked to activate contender reflexes. The year of the Iraq invasion, 2003, saw the first stirrings of discontent among large countries not willing to submit to the whims of the United States. Out of this disjointed array of potential opponents to the 'Washington Consensus', i.e. neoliberal global governance, two main formations were to arise with which Ukraine had significant economic connections as well: first of all, the Eurasian Union (a customs union proposed in 2007, established in 2011, and transformed into a full economic union in 2015), and

second, and indirectly as far as Ukraine was concerned, the BRICS. Further afield was the SCO, which was not of immediate relevance to the Ukrainian situation, although always in the background.

The Eurasian Union was the one credible long-term plan harboured by Putin's Russia that inspired its policies towards the outside world (not the reconstitution of the former USSR as so often claimed in the West). Ukraine figured in it because of the extensive economic ties inherited from the Soviet era. Yet, far from wanting to challenge Western supremacy, let alone capitalism, the state classes of Russia, China, Iran, and a series of lesser countries, first of all aspired to be part of the capitalist world economy; it was only as a consequence of the aggressive policies of the West that they slowly, indeed almost involuntarily, began to gravitate into a contender bloc.

All contender states from the long eighteenth century on have organised larger blocs around themselves to mobilise the human and material resources needed to withstand Western supremacy. From the Napoleonic empire and the Continental System, via Nazi Europe and the Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere, to the Soviet bloc, the state classes of the main contenders have struggled to achieve a countervailing, transnational unity within their respective blocs to match the prior, 'organic' unity of the Lockean heartland. Such contender integration requires a more or less compelling ideology, usually radiating from the core contender state. In this sense, the diverse ideologies of the Enlightenment, Fascism and National Socialism, Asia-First racism, and Marxism-Leninism must be understood, too. Non-Alignment as an aspect of the New International Economic Order coalition of the late 1960s, early 1970s, was also a contender ideology in this sense.⁹⁴ However, the tentative blocs crystallising around the contenders of the new millennium lack such an ideology. As indicated, they are eager to join the 'international community', but do not want to submit to the dangerous mix of global governance pretensions and military adventurism of the Anglophone West and its EU satrapy. This is why the overlapping blocs they have built, and are still building, appear so cobbled together, fractious and half-hearted, riven by internal rivalries as well.

If there was a potential bloc ideology in the case of the Eurasian Union, it would be Eurasianism, a 1920s idea of 'White', émigré Russians. They saw the Bolshevik and Stalinist revolutions as levers to modernise the country, and once a conservative restoration would have taken place, Russia would reclaim its rightful position as a world power again.⁹⁵ In the 1990s this vision won new acclaim in the version crafted by Alexander Dugin, whom Charles Clover characterises as 'a right wing intellectual and bohemian who emerged from the Perestroika era in the 1980s as one of Russia's chief nationalists'. Dugin's *The Foundations of Geopolitics* of 1997 resulted from discussions with the Russian General Staff Academy and various right-wing or nationalist circles, including Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party. The book speaks of a 'Eurasian Empire', to be constructed on the basis of pushing back US influence and liberalism from Eurasia. Of the various proposals to reorder the post-Soviet space in this context, Dugin's warning that 'Ukraine, as an independent state with certain territorial ambitions, represents an enormous danger for all of Eurasia'⁹⁶ is the most relevant to mention here.

Inevitably Dugin's ideas determined Russian policy only in a diluted form, through the conservative nationalist Izborsky Club. According to Richard Sakwa, Sergei Glazyev, who would become Putin's closest adviser on Eurasian integration, has embraced many of the

anti-Western positions adopted by the Izborsky Club, which also advocates authoritarian leadership and state capitalism.⁹⁷ This strand of contender state ideology overlaps with another, futuristic and progressive Eurasian perspective, the Trans-Eurasian Development Corridor (TBER in Russian). It projects new cities laid out along integral energy transport highways, and adopts a much more positive view of the role of Japanese, German and Italian assistance in realising this project. These countries are seen as necessary to supply the know-how and finance in order to realise a vision that originates in Russian fundamental ecology and philosophy (e.g. theories of the biosphere and the noösphere), but which lacks an applied science and technology dimension.⁹⁸

There were no doubt impulses to turn the idea of a Eurasian Union into 'one of the institutional pillars of "greater Europe"', the latest manifestation of Gaullist aspirations for a plural Europe united from Lisbon to Vladivostok' – akin to Gorbachev's vision of a Common European Home. But for this idea there were no takers in the West.⁹⁹ The anti-Iraq invasion consensus of 2003 may have briefly inspired the belief that a durable collaboration might be possible, but it evaporated within a year: German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder became active in gas pipeline ventures linking Russia and Europe (the Nord Stream project); otherwise the EU states soon joined the NATO ranks again. Within a year of the invasion, France and Germany agreed with Britain and the United States to cancel Iraq's pre-war debts.¹⁰⁰

Before long, however, the Eurasian project came to overlap with the simultaneous ascent of the BRICS. As their economic weight grew, the BRICS gradually turned from a banker's gimmick to acquire a collective identity. Comprising half the world's population, the bloc was closing in on the West on the eve of the 2008 financial crisis. In Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms, China's economy was now three-quarters the size of that of the United States, and India was no. 4 behind Japan, whilst Brazil and Russia were catching up with the main EU states.¹⁰¹ Yanis Varoufakis maintains that 2008 has reduced the role of the United States as the destination of the world's surpluses of money and products, to a mere haven for flight capital. This left only one leg of the 'Global Minotaur' standing, the foreign purchase of US Treasury Bonds and other safe assets.¹⁰² According to Wolfgang Streeck, the crisis also marked the moment in which all attempts by which Western governments had sought to cover the 'hegemonic deficit' by throwing money into the breach (inflation, state and private debt), had been exhausted.¹⁰³ Thus, the basis for Western hegemony is eroding domestically whilst global governance by the West became increasingly dependent on force, the 'defence of globalisation'.

Ukraine, too, suffered a severe slump and it was from 2008 on that a veritable contest over the country's political-economic orientation erupted. Besides gas, the sector of the Ukrainian economy over which both Western capital and at least two states of the Eurasian and BRICS blocs were eager to extend their dominion was the country's agriculture. Ukraine has over 32 million hectares of fertile, arable land, the famous 'black earth', equivalent to one-third of the entire agricultural land in the EU. Whilst no doubt impoverished due to mismanagement and overexploitation, at the time of independence 'most experts pointed to agriculture as one of the country's main assets'.¹⁰⁴ Yet by the late 1990s, the de-nationalisation of collective farms had not progressed far and only around half of the land had been distributed among farmers or leased to non-farmers. 'Agriculture [was] in deep crisis and for many years practically nothing has been invested.

Harvests gradually declined due to degradation of soils and organizational and financial problems of the kolkhozes.¹⁰⁵

Even so, Ukraine in 2008–9 was the world's third largest exporter of grain.¹⁰⁶ Since one aspect of the shock caused by the financial crisis was the spread of food riots in many poorer countries, governments from all over the world were looking to invest in potential agricultural surplus producers. China, with 14–15 per cent of global population but only 9 per cent of the world's farmland, intended to spend some of its \$1.8 trillion in foreign exchange on buying or leasing farmland or importing foodstuffs from agricultural land leased by transnational agribusiness.¹⁰⁷ Ukraine was a suitable target, and Russian business had shown the way by investing in agriculture in its southern neighbour. An enduring orientation of Ukraine towards the BRICS and the Eurasian Union was therefore a distinct possibility, on top of its heavy-industrial contribution to the former Soviet economy in exchange for gas. Western policy planners no doubt realised that continuing economic relations between Ukraine and Russia would assist Moscow's aspiration to emancipate itself from the role of a one-sided energy supplier; thus bolstering the Eurasian Union, and reinforcing its position among the BRICS. Hence, after the coup of February 2014, Western commentators did not hide their relief that adhesion to the Eurasian bloc had been prevented. In the words of a Chatham House author, 'Had Ukraine joined, the Eurasian Union would have extended westwards right up to the EU's borders. But this key element—and probably the whole enterprise—is stalled at best because the Ukrainians have created new facts on the ground.'¹⁰⁸

Russia's economic influence in Ukraine at this juncture was highly uneven. Its major success, apart from indirect influence on the gas business through Firtash, was ISD, the one major Donbass heavy industry conglomerate meanwhile outside the reach of Akhmetov. However, ISD had no domestic iron ore base of its own for its two Ukrainian steelworks (plus one in Poland); Ukrainian ore is under exclusive control of Akhmetov's Metinvest, and the group therefore had to import expensive ore from Brazil and Russia. In 2009, Hayduk sold his share and the holding was taken over by Russian investors acting through an offshore Swiss consortium, Carbofer. Taruta and Mkrtychan remained board member and director-general, respectively.¹⁰⁹ Briefly it seemed as if Russians were on their way to taking over other heavy-industry companies as well, but the Ukrainian government forbade the takeover of Zaporizhstal, which instead landed in the lap of Akhmetov, and after 2010, further Russian investment was frozen.

All Ukrainian oligarchs are fearful of their Russian brethren, who are able to out-compete them and take over their assets.¹¹⁰ Of the top-hundred conglomerates ('business clusters') of Ukraine, very nearly two-thirds were in Ukrainian hands in 2010. Forty-five were privately owned; 19, state-owned, although often managed for the benefit of certain oligarchs; 13, Western (including Arcelor Mittal), and four, Russian (plus a number of jointly owned corporations).¹¹¹ The control of the Ukrainian economy by the oligarchs, insulating it from large-scale incursions of foreign capital, then, would suggest that a position in between West and East would bring them the maximum advantage, whilst guaranteeing their property; if only they can keep democracy at bay. Indeed still in 2011–12 there was no further economic shift to the West to speak of and the 1996 level of interconnection with the former Soviet economy remained. As Slawomir Matuszak notes, 'when all exports are considered *en masse*, it becomes clear

that there is no predominant direction—38 percent of Ukrainian goods are sold to Commonwealth of Independent States countries (notably, high value-added products), 26 percent to the EU, and 36 percent to other countries'.¹¹² In other words, a shift away from the former Soviet space and Russia in particular would negatively affect the high-end industry of Ukraine most of all.

The export of labour power, too, was distributed roughly equally between East and West. From January 2010 to June 2012, 1.2 million Ukrainians, or 3.4 per cent of the population, were working abroad, notably people from the poorer, ethnic-Ukrainian west; although other estimates are much higher. The distribution of migrant labour was towards Russia (43 per cent), followed by Poland (14 per cent), Italy and the Czech Republic (both 13 per cent).¹¹³ In 2012, workers' remittances to Ukraine amounted to a staggering \$7.5 billion (1.5 billion more than net foreign investment, and having sharply risen from less than a billion in 2006). In addition Ukraine is 'one of the main countries of origin of victims of [people] trafficking in Europe'.¹¹⁴

Yet, the oligarchs are divided in fractions and ultimately, as capitalists, they are all competitors, so the logic of maintaining a bridging role between East and West is not equally compelling for all. Only when we recognise them as a class of warring brothers, immersed in a wider field comprising also the transnational capitalist class of the Western heartland and contender state classes, can we reconstruct the individual strategies towards either the EU-Atlantic or the Eurasian spheres, respectively.

Atlantic oligarchs in Ukraine

All Ukrainian oligarchs safeguard their property from national politics by offshoring their holdings in Cyprus and elsewhere in the EU, or further afield. According to Yuliya Yurchenko's investigations, 24 of the top 100 corporations operating in Ukraine in 2010 belonged to four Cyprus-based trusts. Akhmetov's SCM was the largest with 14 corporations and, until 2014, the most powerful (although Firtash had more clout in the Party of Regions). ISD, newly in Russian hands, came second with five corporations, followed by Kolomoisky (Privat Group) and Pinchuk (Interpipe), each with two-and-a-half corporations, the half a joint venture between them. Ukrprominvest, Poroshenko's conglomerate, had two corporations among the top-100.¹¹⁵

Akhmetov, the king of the Donbass, resisted Russian encroachment, but also needed good relations with Russia as the supplier of gas. Firtash was already identified as heading the most pro-Russian group, RUE/RosUkrEnergo. His own DF Group, registered in the Virgin Islands, cannot have held a much different position. Most Ukrainian oligarchs obviously aspire to be integrated into the Atlantic ruling class as respectable businessmen, but beyond offshore domiciling of their corporations and residence abroad (Akhmetov in London, Firtash in Vienna, Kolomoisky in Geneva ...), this remains relatively ephemeral. It is a different matter for Viktor Pinchuk, the pipeline king and Kuchma's son-in-law.

After 2004, having left parliamentary politics, Pinchuk switched to more sophisticated ways of articulating his class interest. Through the 'Yalta European Strategy' (YES), he aims, according to the Pinchuk Foundation's website, to run 'an international independent organization promoting Ukraine's European and global integration. Its annual meeting has become the main high-level platform in the region to discuss strategies

for Wider Europe'. Currently the YES board is chaired by former Polish president A. Kwasniewski. It further comprises the former president of the French Rothschild group; the vice-president of French publicity conglomerate Havas; as well as Javier Solana (former NATO Secretary General and EU high representative for foreign affairs), and several lesser EU figures.¹¹⁶ Importantly, Pinchuk was key in launching the political career of Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who was identified by the Americans as the most suitable prime minister on the eve of the coup of February 2014.¹¹⁷

The Pinchuk Foundation was established two years after YES, when Pinchuk ended his term as a member of parliament in Kiev. The Foundation collaborated with Steven Spielberg to produce a film on the genocide of the Jews in Ukraine, whilst also engaging in human rights projects with George Soros and supporting local Jewish communities. Also the Foundation 'supports the Clinton Global Initiative, the educational programs of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and of the Peres Center for Peace'.¹¹⁸ In 2007, just before the financial crisis, Pinchuk sold his Ukrsoobank, one of the largest in the country, to UniCredit of Italy for \$2 billion.¹¹⁹

Since the Yalta European Strategy organises annual events for which key EU and NATO figures are flown in at his expense, Pinchuk has built a network of prominent interlocutors in the Atlantic ruling class.¹²⁰ Immediately after Obama's inauguration, he solicited the support of the new administration. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in 2009 he pledged a 'five-year, \$29-million commitment to the Clinton Global Initiative ... to train future Ukrainian leaders "to modernize Ukraine"'. The fact that Pinchuk's contribution topped the list of foreign donors of the Clinton foundation signalled his aspiration that Ukraine become 'a successful, free, modern country based on European values'.¹²¹

This also extended to making Ukraine's energy supply independent from Russia. In 2007, Pinchuk established EastOne, headquartered in London, as a holding of some 20 companies and large-scale projects. In 2012, GeoAlliance, managed by EastOne, teamed up with Dutch-registered Arawak Energy Ukraine BV, a subsidiary of Vitol, a company operating in the orbit of Shell, to develop oil and gas fields in the Dnepr-Donets basin in the east. These fields, 16 in all, were then in possession of GeoAlliance. As we see in the next chapter, Shell itself would soon join in the prospective exploitation of Donbass energy resources, notably the Yuzivska field near Slavyansk.¹²²

In September 2013, with pressure mounting on Yanukovich to sign up to the EU Association Agreement and the DCFTA, the Clintons, former Iraq commander and CIA director David Petraeus, former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, ex-World Bank head Robert Zoellick, Carl Bildt and Radoslaw Sikorski (the architects of the Eastern Partnership), Israeli President Shimon Peres, Blair, Nord Stream chairman Gerhard Schröder, the disgraced IMF head, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and many others attended the YES convention. Yanukovich himself was present too, as was the man who would eventually take his place after the first post-coup election, Petro Poroshenko. Bill Richardson, former US energy secretary, had come to speak on the shale gas revolution by which Washington hoped to reduce Russian influence, and in which Ukraine, too, was expected to join by developing its own shale gas resources in the east. However, the warning of Putin's aforementioned Eurasian Union adviser, Sergei Glazyev, that by signing up to the Association Agreement and the DCFTA, Ukraine would increase its budget

deficit and become entirely reliant on foreign funding it would not be able to pay back, must have stuck in Yanukovych's mind when he returned to Kiev.¹²³

Pinchuk may have been 'anti-Putin' in view of his Atlantic stance, but was also keen to retain access to the Russian market.¹²⁴ The one really anti-Russian oligarch on the other hand is Ihor Kolomoisky. When he acquired control over Ukratnafta, owner of the Kremenchuk refinery, in 2008–10, Kolomoisky forced out the Russian investors, who held 55 per cent in the company. The 'Tat' in the company's name refers to Tatarstan in the Russian Federation, which jointly with Ukraine's government owned Ukratnafta from the start in 1994. Four years later, two Russian investment trusts took over part of the Ukrainian government's share (reduced to 43 per cent, and managed by Naftogaz Ukrainy, also a Kolomoisky preserve). A court in Kiev in 2008 declared these Russian investments illegal and handed them to the Privat Group. A year later, it also ruled against Tatarstan's property rights, raising Kolomoisky's share to 47 per cent, after which Privat took over the management altogether. The Tatarstan oil company, Tatneft, which still owned 10 per cent, in protest cut oil supplies, but now Kolomoisky, who controls the oil pipeline company UkrTransNafta (formally a state-owned company, but like Naftogaz, under Kolomoisky management), switched to Azeri oil.¹²⁵ Kremenchuk, it should be noted, is the one major refinery in all of Ukraine, from which Kolomoisky would supply, among other things, jet fuel for the Ukrainian air force in the civil war.

In another row with Russian business, Kolomoisky soured his initially friendly relations with Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, the owner also of Chelsea football club in London, where he lives. Kolomoisky at one point sold five coke- and steel-making factories to the Russian oligarch for \$1 billion in cash and another billion in shares in Evraz, Abramovich's steel concern. However, Kolomoisky later dumped most of his shares, claiming Evraz was being mismanaged.¹²⁶ The clash with Abramovich spilled over into Kolomoisky's violent diatribes and actual death threats against Putin (to which the Russian president responded by calling him a thief), which have been cited as pointing to his possible role in the downing of MH17, supposedly mistaken for the Russian presidential plane flying back from Brazil at the same time.¹²⁷

What also needs mentioning in connection with the civil war and all that it entailed is Kolomoisky's interest in Ukraine's largest natural gas company, Burisma. In 2012 the Ukrainian Anticorruption Action Center found out that the director of a state-owned Donbass coal mine who wanted to privatise it, was asked to first incorporate nine gas fields into the mine, and then upon privatisation (in 2011), hand over four of them to Management Assets Corporation (MAKO). MAKO is the holding of the Yanukovych family, headed by the president's son, Oleksandr, then on a rampage that would catapult him into the top-100 richest Ukrainians. However, in this case, the five other, far more productive fields were obtained by Ukrnaftoburinnia, which is 90 per cent owned by a Cypriot company, Deripon Commercial Ltd. The final owner of Deripon is the Virgin Island-based, Burrad Financial Corp., a company in the orbit of the Privat Group and Ihor Kolomoisky. Burisma was founded in 2002 and registered in Cyprus in 2004 after the Orange Revolution.

Via these and other schemes, the Action Center concludes, 'Ihor Kolomoisky managed to seize the largest reserves of natural gas in Ukraine. But, given the appetite and possibilities of his business rivals, Kolomoisky will not last as a leading player

for very long'.¹²⁸ Unless of course, these business rivals, notably the Yanukovych family, would be removed altogether. Then another problem would arise: of the two main gas fields of Ukraine, the by far largest one, the Dnepr-Donets field (67 per cent of reserves, the smaller one is in Galicia), accounts for 95 per cent of Burisma's production. The exploitation of these fields was thrown into jeopardy by the Russian-Ukrainian uprising against the *coup d'état*, as were permits in the possession of Burisma to explore the Azov-Kuban Basin of Crimea. This, one would surmise, not only exacerbated Kolomoisky's fury against the rebels (and in fact, against all Russian-Ukrainians), but also led him to recruit American directors for Burisma with connections to the highest levels of the Obama administration in Washington to ensure US support in the civil war.¹²⁹

Finally, Kolomoisky for all intents and purposes was involved in the country's largest airline company, Ukrainian International Airlines (MAU), via Cyprus-based Ontobet Promotions. When the Ukrainian state sold its majority share to a Ukraine-based investment firm and Ontobet in 2011, Ontobet became the effective owner: It is the property of Privat (although this was denied by MAU). In addition, Privat also owned Dniproavia, based at Dnepropetrovsk Airport, and a few other small airline companies operating from Borispol and Donetsk airports and in Scandinavia, but these all went bankrupt in 2012.¹³⁰ These connections, as well as links to Israeli security firms with airport facilities across Europe, have come up in further claims that Kolomoisky was involved in the downing of MH17, to which we return in [Chapter 4](#).¹³¹

A final category of oligarchs looking to the West and who deserve to be mentioned here, were a number of food and agriculture magnates not (yet) in the class of Pinchuk and Kolomoisky (let alone, of Akhmetov or Firtash). They too were dependent on a fundamental change in Ukraine's international orientation, in this case, to the EU. A Polish think tank, investigating the potential reshuffle as a result of a transformation towards an agrarian export economy on the basis of the DCFTA provisions for access to the European market, in 2013 identified the following potential beneficiaries:

Confectionery giant Roshen, owned by Petro Poroshenko, given that [its] products are levied import tariffs of about 35–40 percent in the EU. Lifting import duties would also be beneficial to the Kernel group, owned by Andriy Verevskiy, as his company exports about 17 percent of its grain and oil to the EU. Likewise, Mironivsky Hliboprodukt [poultry], owned by Yuri Kosyuk, could gain from the elimination of both sanitary barriers and import duties, to increase its fowl exports to the EU from the meagre share of 5 percent.¹³²

In 2013 this fraction of agricultural exporters had as yet little influence on Ukrainian government policy, except perhaps for Verevskiy, who was a Yanukovych ally. Poroshenko and Kosyuk, however, would rise to positions of power after the February coup.

So whilst Ukraine in its foreign economic relations prior to February 2014 was uneasily balanced between East and West, the extraordinary concentration of the country's assets in the hands of Ukrainian oligarchs gave the differences between them on this issue a disproportional importance. When President Viktor Yanukovych finally retreated from the hard choice placed before him and in November 2013

refused to sign the EU Association Agreement which he had wanted to balance with association with the Eurasian Union, he provoked the wrath of a population increasingly impatient with the endless stealing of the oligarchs. To this we turn in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Cited in House of Lords, *The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine* [EU Committee, 6th Report of Session 2014–2015], 2015, pp. 64–5, emphasis added. Of course Klaus himself presided over the splitting up of Czechoslovakia in 1993.
- 2 James Sherr, 'A war of narratives and arms'. In K. Giles, P. Hanson, R. Lyne, J. Nixey, J. Sherr and A. Wood, *The Russian Challenge* [Chatham House Report, June]. London: The Institute of International Affairs, 2015, p. 26.
- 3 The rise of the capitalist heartland, too, can be traced to its origins on the frontier of Western Christianity. See my *Nomads, Empires, States*, vol. I of *Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy*. London: Pluto, 2007, chs 3 and 4.
- 4 Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: State and Nation Building*. London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 19–20.
- 5 Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt* [trans. M. Sokolinski and H.A. La Farge]. New York: Harper & Row, 1979 [1978], p. 22.
- 6 Hans van Zon, André Batako and Anna Kreslavska. *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine: The Example of Zaporizhzhya*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, pp. 10–11. Yuliya Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation, transnationalisation of the state and the transnational capitalist class in post-1991 Ukraine' (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 2013), pp. 81–2.
- 7 Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 11, table 11.
- 8 Kuzio, *Ukraine*, p. 171; van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, p. 54 n. 9.
- 9 Kuzio, *Ukraine*, p. 69, citing Kravchuk; and Andrew Wilson cited in Taras Kuzio, "'Nationalising states' or nation-building? A critical review of the literature and empirical evidence'. *Nations and Nationalism*, 7 (2) 2001, p. 141.
- 10 Nikolai Petro, 'Political assistance: keeping the focus on Ukraine'. In Adriël Kasonta, ed., *The Sanctions on Russia*. Bow Group Research Paper, August 2015 (online), p. 82.
- 11 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 9; David Lane, *The Rise and Fall of State Socialism: Industrial Society and the Socialist State*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, p. 128; van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, p. 49.
- 12 Denys Kiryukhin, 'Russia and Ukraine: the clash of conservative projects'. *European Politics and Society*, 17 (4) 2016, p. 442. On socialist nationality policy, see my *The Discipline of Western Supremacy*, vol. III of *Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy*. London: Pluto, 2014, pp. 34–41.
- 13 Roderic Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook on the West: from convergence to confrontation'. In Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge*, p. 7.
- 14 Arthur Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and Its Heritage*. New York: Random House, 1976.
- 15 Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: A History of the Relations between the Soviet Union and the Rest of the World 1917–1929*, abridged edn. New York: Vintage, 1960 [1951; 1933], pp. 533–4. Petlura was assassinated by a Jewish activist in Paris in 1928, Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945*. London: Pan, 1964, p. 558.
- 16 Carrère d'Encausse, *Decline of an Empire*, pp. 25–36.
- 17 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 15.
- 18 Werth, *Russia at War*, pp. 708–9n[†].

- 19 Magnus Linklater, Isabel Hilton and Neal Ascherson, *Het Vierde Reich: Het Barbie-dossier* [trans. G. Grasman]. Utrecht: Bruna, 1984, p. 46.
- 20 Russ Bellant, *Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party*, 3rd edn [preface Chip Berlet]. Boston: South End Press, 1991 [1988], p. 73; Christopher Simpson, *Blowback: America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988, pp. 167, 180–1.
- 21 Simpson, *Blowback*, pp. 102, 140, 149.
- 22 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 19.
- 23 Valeria Mesherikov cited in Kuzio, *Ukraine*, p. 52.
- 24 Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, pp. 35–6.
- 25 Kiryukhin, 'Russia and Ukraine', p. 440.
- 26 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 23.
- 27 In the Second World War the Wolf's Hook was the symbol of the Waffen-SS division Das Reich and the Dutch Nazi Landstorm. See *Ukraine Antifascist Solidarity*, 'Who is Andriy Parubiy? Protest UK visit of Ukrainian politician with far right links'. 13 October 2015 (online).
- 28 Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2017, pp. 22–3; Wikipedia, 'Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian People's Self-Defence'.
- 29 Cited in De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 23; see Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 21.
- 30 Slawomir Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy: The Influence of Business Groups on Ukrainian Politics* [OSW Studies no. 42]. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2012, pp. 14–15, 25–6.
- 31 Kuzio, *Ukraine*, p. 24.
- 32 Cited in Edouard Pflimlin, 'Ukraine, une société bloquée: paix à l'extérieur, tensions à l'intérieur'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1998. Archives 1954–2012 [CD-ROM edn].
- 33 Kiryukhin, 'Russia and Ukraine', p. 444. Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, pp. 50–2; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 58–60. Taras Kuzio, 'Nation-building, history writing and competition over the legacy of Kyiv Rus in Ukraine'. *Nationalities Papers*, 33 (1) 2005, pp. 29–58.
- 34 Anders Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy: Russia, Ukraine and the United States*. Working Paper, no. 296. Warsaw: Centre for Social and Economic Research (CASE), 2005, p. 15. Åslund at the time was a non-executive director of Vostok Nafta Ltd, an offshore Swedish holding of Gazprom shares; his working paper was financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 35 Taras Kuzio, 'Regime type and politics in Ukraine under Kuchma'. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 38 2005, p. 170n3.
- 36 Lazarenko had embezzled \$200 million from state funds, Sergii Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters: a typology of oligarchs'. *Transit*, 45, 15 May 2014 (online).
- 37 Cited in Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy*, p. 10; Bakai in Kuchma's second term was caught having embezzled more than \$100 million from the state oil and gas monopoly, Naftogaz Ukrainy, as we see below.
- 38 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 15; the FBI found that Tymoshenko transferred at least \$100 million from an offshore company in Cyprus to Lazarenko's accounts, Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.
- 39 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 14.
- 40 Pflimlin, 'Ukraine, une société bloquée'; Yuliya Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine: the neoliberalization of Europe's "Wild East"'. *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 20 (2–3) 2012, p. 131.
- 41 Ken Hanly, 'Ukraine and the TTIP'. *The Digital Journal*, 27 March 2014 (online).
- 42 Ronen Palan, *The Offshore World: Sovereign Markets, Virtual Places, and Nomad Millionaires*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

- 43 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 67. Other targets of the emerging big players were the chain connecting coking coal, cokes and sheet metal production (also for pipes); and the one linking thermal coal, power generation and metal, Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation'.
- 44 Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, pp. 24, 27, 39; Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 72, 82.
- 45 Misha Glenny, *McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime*. London: Vintage, 2009, p. 96; Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', p. 133.
- 46 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 72.
- 47 Privat owned 42 per cent of Ukrtatnafta and, in 2007, Kolomoisky would take full operational control. 'Ukratatnafta evaluated at \$2 billion'. *Tatarinform*, 31 March 2011 (online); 'Ukraine oil refineries'. *A Barrel Full*, n.d. (online). See *Wikipedia*, 'Ukrnafta' and 'Ihor Kolomoisky'.
- 48 It ended with the dismissal of the minister of justice, S. Holovaty, who had initiated a campaign against corruption. Pflimlin, 'Ukraine, une société bloquée'; Kuzio, 'Regime type and politics in Ukraine', p. 170n. Tihipko would become governor of the National Bank of Ukraine from 2002 to 2004.
- 49 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 51.
- 50 Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy*, p. 9.
- 51 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 23; Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 101–2; *Wikipedia*, 'Kravchenko'.
- 52 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 16; Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 104.
- 53 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 14–15. Vladimir Putin and the wife of Dmitry Medvedev are the godparents of Medvedchuk's daughter.
- 54 Glenny, *McMafia*, p. 102.
- 55 Isobel Koshiw, 'Victor Pinchuk: friend or foe of Ukraine?' *Kyiv Post*, 14 October 2016 (online).
- 56 Keith A. Darden, 'Blackmail as a tool of state domination: Ukraine under Kuchma'. *East European Constitutional Review*, Spring/Summer 2001, p. 68.
- 57 Glenny, *McMafia*, pp. 100–1.
- 58 Robert Parry, 'MH-17 probe trusts torture-implicated Ukraine'. *Consortium News*, 13 June 2016 (online).
- 59 Kuzio, 'Regime type and politics in Ukraine', p. 169; Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy*, pp. 8–9.
- 60 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 74, 76; Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, p. 102.
- 61 Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', p. 132; 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 73, 76–7, table 3.1.
- 62 Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'; Arno Wellens, 'Stop het associatieverdrag: Oekraïense oligarchen moeten óók belasting betalen [925 Kamervragen]'. *925.nl*, 29 January 2016 (online).
- 63 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 51; Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', p. 134.
- 64 The 'Party of Regional Revival of Ukraine' was formed in 1997, and the Party of Regions in 2000. Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 14.
- 65 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 73.
- 66 Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, pp. 57–8, 23.
- 67 Pflimlin, 'Ukraine, une société bloquée'.
- 68 Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.
- 69 Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', p. 133.
- 70 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 105.
- 71 Glenny, *McMafia*, pp. 93–8; Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', p. 138.
- 72 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 18.
- 73 Yurchenko, "'Black Holes" in the political economy of Ukraine', pp. 133–4, 138; Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.

- 74 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 18.
- 75 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 20–2; Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.
- 76 Yurchenko, "'Black Holes' in the political economy of Ukraine', pp. 126–7; Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 22.
- 77 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 23, a phrase attributed to Åslund.
- 78 Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy*, p. 9, mentions two, Yevhen Chervonenko and David Zhvania. The draft version of this working paper I happened to see on the internet also included Poroshenko, but for some reason he was deleted in the final version.
- 79 Anders Åslund claims the sale 'generated substantial revenue and it was comparatively transparent', Åslund, *Comparative Oligarchy*, p. 11, although he concedes it was 'not competitive'.
- 80 Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.
- 81 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 23–4.
- 82 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 109.
- 83 Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'; Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 110.
- 84 Annabelle Chapman, 'Ukraine's chocolate king to the rescue'. *Foreign Policy*, 22 May 2014 (online). In 2010, Poroshenko bought the Sebastopol shipyard, one of Ukraine's largest, which also serves the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 108–10.
- 85 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 126. Tymoshenko was soon dismissed and replaced by a compromise candidate (i.e. a compromise with Donetsk capital), A. Moroz, the leader of the Socialist Party.
- 86 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 25–6.
- 87 In 2007 Firtash reorganised his Ukrainian business empire, after his initials, into the DF Group domiciled in the British Virgin Islands, with various companies also based in Austria and Switzerland. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 53–4, 62–3; Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 126, 133; Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters'.
- 88 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 24, 33.
- 89 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 52–4, 64.
- 90 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 26, 28–9. He does not mention Mkrtchan, the director-general.
- 91 Olha Holoyda, 'Ukrainian oligarchs and the "family", a new generation of czars—or hope for the middle class?' *Scholar Research Brief*. Washington, DC: IREX, 2013, p. 2. By comparison, the 100 richest Russians control 35 per cent of the country's wealth, Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 61.
- 92 Van Zon et al., *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine*, pp. 134–5.
- 93 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', pp. 140, 145, table 5.1 and 146, table 5.2.
- 94 See my *Transnational Classes and International Relations*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 79–84, and *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq*, London: Pluto and New Delhi: Sage Vistaar, pp. 123–4, respectively.
- 95 *Global Rivalries*, p. 353.
- 96 Cited in Charles Clover, 'The unlikely origins of Russia's manifest destiny'. *Foreign Policy*, 27 July 2016 (online).
- 97 Richard Sakwa, 'How the Eurasian elites envisage the rôle of the EEU in global perspective'. *European Politics and Society*, 17 (supl.) 2016, p. 14.
- 98 Yury Gromyko, 'Beyond the "BRICS": new patterns of development cooperation in the trans-Eurasian corridor'. In K. van der Pijl, ed., *Handbook of the International Political Economy of Production*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015.
- 99 Sakwa, 'The Eurasian elites', p. 5.
- 100 Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, *The Globalization of NATO* [foreword Denis J. Halliday]. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2012, p. 36.
- 101 Leslie Elliott Armijo, 'The BRICs countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as analytical category: mirage or insight?' *Asian Perspective*, 31 (4) 2007, p. 12.

- 102 Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, Europe and the Future of the Global Economy* [rev. edn]. London: Zed Books, 2013 [2011].
- 103 Wolfgang Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit: Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus* [Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2012]. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2013.
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From the Maidan revolt to regime change

As a protest against oligarchic rule and corruption, the Maidan revolt was not unlike the Orange Revolution ten years earlier; but there were also differences. While this time the Yanukovych family's quest for personal enrichment contributed to the president's rapidly eroding popularity, Maidan also demonstrated that 'Europe' had become a code word for stopping the ongoing plunder. So when Yanukovych, after protracted hesitation, withheld his signature from Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU, anger mounted. As in 2004, the revolt was also an opportunity for the oligarchs marginalised by the ascendant Donetsk bloc to reclaim power. Yanukovych, who had been caught committing election fraud in 2004, had won the presidency this time around without irregularities; but rather than disciplining the oligarchy, as Putin did, he geared his centralism to consolidating the Party of Regions and the oligarchs behind it as the dominant forces in the country.¹

The most decisive new factor was the armed insurrection by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists. This created the space for actual fascists to hijack the revolt and, working closely with neoconservatives in the US government and NATO, to execute a *coup d'état* in February 2014. By their use of deadly force (falsely ascribed by the coup plotters and the Western media to the riot police), the Ukrainian ultras demonstrated they were ready to kill their own compatriots to achieve their aims. As the crisis unfolded, the West was divided. On 20 February 2014, when EU foreign ministers began negotiating with Yanukovych about containing the violence without a US representative present, the American ambassador, Geoffrey Pyatt, met with Andriy Parubiy, by then head of the Maidan ultras and commander of its 12,000-strong armed wing, to discuss the president's fate. After the seizure of power two days later, Parubiy became head of the crucial National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) in an overwhelmingly Ukrainian nationalist government stacked with Far Right elements from Svoboda and Right Sector and led by Viktor Pinchuk's political front man, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Like the coup president, Turchynov, Yatsenyuk was a member of Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party; he was picked as the ideal prime ministerial candidate by US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland.

In this chapter I argue that from 2010, the West's initiatives to draw Ukraine and other former Soviet republics into its orbit (Partnership for Peace, GUAM, Eastern Partnership, EU Association Agreement/DCFTA) began to run into serious opposition in Ukraine as the federalist bloc consolidated its power both economically and politically. Two years

into the Yanukovych presidency, the return of Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin as president of the Russian Federation further narrowed the options for the West, whilst simultaneously constraining the manoeuvring space of the government in Kiev in between the EU and the Eurasian alternative held out by Moscow.

In addition to a more aggressive US posture towards Russia, the available evidence suggests that Western institutions in Ukraine, both governmental and non-governmental, had been preparing the terrain for another 'civil society' revolt. The US-supported coup not only vindicated these investments but also restored Western unity by reining in the short-lived EU departure from the Atlantic course, just as the downing of MH17 would do in July with respect to US sanctions. As armed squads rampaged across the country, the Russian-Ukrainian population, threatened with the loss of political and language rights as well as economic marginalisation, then revolted in turn. The parliament of historically Russian Crimea, an unwilling part of independent Ukraine, organised a referendum to secede and, with Russian special forces protecting the vital Sebastopol naval base and other strategic assets, requested re-incorporation into the Russian Federation. Amidst a roar of indignation about this supposed annexation, the anti-Putin campaign in the West then shifted gear to full-scale economic warfare, targeting the South Stream pipeline project and sacrificing both EU energy security and the Ukrainian economy to the American master plan.

Prelude to revolt

In January 2010 Yanukovych beat Yuliya Tymoshenko in round two of a presidential election that exposed the regional divide, but was considered legitimate by domestic and international observers. The new president set out to reinforce the state by restoring the original presidential system and annulling the Orange mutation to a parliamentary one. Besides appointing regional governors from his own party, the president appointed its chair, Mykola Azarov, as prime minister.²

The election of Yanukovych gave the Party of Regions and connected oligarchic groups, the Donetsk clan and Firtash's RosUkrEnergo, a near-monopoly of political power. Serhiy Lyovochkin, the ally of Yuri Boyko and Dmytro Firtash, became head of the presidential administration. Boyko was appointed as energy minister; and through him, Firtash gained control of Naftogaz Ukrainy and several of its subsidiaries, although Kolomoiskiy held on to key assets in the energy domain too, notably in oil refining. In August 2011, Yuliya Tymoshenko, much weakened by the desertion of former oligarch allies, was convicted to a seven-year prison sentence, a step for which representatives of the RosUkrEnergo group had been lobbying hard.³

Yanukovych and his two sons, Oleksandr and Viktor, now emerged as a separate group in the oligarchy, nicknamed 'the Family'. Oleksandr Yanukovych joined the ranks of the 100 richest Ukrainians soon after his father had assumed office.⁴ The dynamics of competition now entered the state itself. One axis of rivalry was between Yanukovych Sr. and Akhmetov, who preferred a coalition with Yuliya Tymoshenko to limit the president's powers.⁵ RosUkrEnergo, too, was preyed on by the Family. As Sergii Leshchenko relates, 'Firtash himself admitted that Yanukovych owned 50 per cent of everything he, the oligarch, had acquired since Yanukovych's election to the presidency'.⁶ It is important to

remember that such oligarchic enrichment was no mere 'corruption' but the normal predatory pattern of accumulation characteristic of money-dealing capital in the period. Ukrainian banks, led by Kolomoisky's Privat Bank, were already deep into the carry trade of borrowing at record low interest rates in the West and then lending at high rates in the domestic market.⁷ Banks in the Baltic states specialised in white-washing stolen funds with impunity; the chairman of the parliamentary commission on these practices was the co-owner of a Latvian bank, involved in such round-tripping (capital flight returning as 'investment') to the tune of several billions. Besides Cyprus, the Netherlands too is a key pivot in this process.⁸ Ukraine's GDP meanwhile remained stuck at the 1991 level, the only post-Soviet country besides Kyrgyzstan to manage such profound failure.

By 2012 Yanukovych's Party of Regions held 42 per cent of the seats in parliament, had branches in 17 of the 27 administrative regions, and was rooted in 11,600 local chapters. Under the federalist administration, Russian regained its status of a regional language and a new law made any language spoken by at least 10 per cent in a particular region an official language next to Ukrainian. Russian acquired that status in 13 of Ukraine's 27 oblasts. This did not solve the language issue in the central administration or in higher education, but it was important nevertheless.⁹

In the 2012 elections, Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party did well, whilst the neo-Nazis of Svoboda pulled 10.4 per cent of the vote, prompting a resolution of the European Parliament condemning the party as 'xenophobic, anti-Semitic and racist'. The World Jewish Congress in 2013 called on European countries to outlaw Svoboda along with Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece.¹⁰ However, in a sign of things to come, when a UN resolution against the glorification of the Nazis and members of the Waffen-SS was adopted in 2012, the United States, Canada and Palau voted against, whilst most EU countries abstained.¹¹

Towards the EU Association Agreement and back

As discussed in [Chapter I](#), in 2008 the Baltic bloc in the EU (Poland, Sweden and the three Baltic states) countered Russia's Eurasian project by launching the Eastern Partnership. Under it, Ukraine was invited to sign a version of the EU Association Agreement and the DCFTA that would make the country a North Atlantic protectorate, locking in defence cooperation with NATO (in articles 4, 7 and 10 of the Agreement) and effectively terminating the country's neutrality between the Atlantic bloc and Russia. Economically, the agreement sought to de-link Ukraine from the Russian economy, the Eurasian Union and the BRICS, consolidating the property rights of the oligarchy¹² and limiting Ukraine's sovereignty along the lines worked out in the Policy Planning Directorate of the State Department in Washington in 2005, complete with defence provisions.

Yanukovych played off the EU and Russia against each other but activated Ukraine's divisions in potentially dangerous ways in the process. When he accepted the EU offer in principle in 2011, he simultaneously proposed a 3+1 formula that would give Ukraine, and indirectly, the EU, free access to the Eurasian Customs Union, to be established in July between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Given that the Russian market was then roughly 30 per cent of Ukraine's foreign trade, this could be expected to jeopardise both the 30 per cent of Ukrainian imports that were Russian as well as the very survival

of Ukraine's own industry¹³ While strong Russian influences were undoubtedly at play (economic, but also for instance in the intelligence service, SBU), Yanukovych was less pro-Russian than an oligarch and a federalist.¹⁴ On the advice of Poroshenko, the new president had even made his first foreign visit not to Moscow, but to Brussels. However, he was unwilling to adopt an *anti-Russian* policy and in April 2010 he signed an agreement in Kharkov with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to renew the lease of Sebastopol for another 25 years (until 2042), in exchange for a discount on the gas price.¹⁵ Economically, the signing of the draft EU Association Agreement in March 2012 and the DCFTA soon after, on the other hand meant that 'Ukraine would no longer be able to maintain the same level of [economic] relations with Russia'.¹⁶

In 2012 and 2013, the Dutch foreign minister, Frans Timmermans – who later distinguished himself by making a theatrical speech on MH17 in the UN Security Council and was promoted to first vice-president of the European Commission three months afterwards – was busy negotiating with the Baltic bloc and other former Soviet bloc states about the association of the Eastern Partnership countries, notably Ukraine, with the EU. Here it must be remembered that the Netherlands is a haven for Russian and Ukrainian mailbox companies, second only to Cyprus and followed by the British Virgin Islands, hosting billions of dollars in assets which are then round-tripped as investment in the country of origin. Lukoil operates its European assets via one of its 59 Dutch subsidiaries; Novatek, Russia's second-largest gas producer, operates an €800 million Dutch subsidiary, Arctic Russia BV.¹⁷ This may explain the active involvement of The Hague across the former USSR.

Documents obtained under a Freedom of Information request by the Platform for Authentic Journalism on the eve of the Dutch Ukraine referendum of April 2016 reveal that already in mid-2012, Western politicians doubted whether Yanukovych was the man to implement the neoliberal contract with the EU and the West given his desire for a tripartite deal.¹⁸ Yet Russian diplomats remained convinced that EU and Eurasian association might be combined.¹⁹

There is more to these different assessments of political possibilities. In June 2013, the Polish foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski, the architect (with Sweden's Carl Bildt) of the Eastern Partnership, was at The Hague. Much of what he and Timmermans discussed has been blacked out in the documents but we do know they discussed the European Endowment for Democracy (which would be prominently involved in financing the Maidan revolt) and the Polish lead in 'cooperation in the NATO and EU frameworks'.²⁰ We also know that Timmermans told the Estonian minister of foreign affairs, Urmas Paet, in August, that the Association Agreement might not be signed with Yanukovych in power.²¹ These facts raise questions about the extent to which the EU too was keeping open the option of regime change.

There is no reason to doubt that the EU intended to transform the Ukrainian economy into a primary resource base. The Netherlands, as one of the most important foreign players in Ukraine, is active in agricultural equipment, seed, bio-fuels and export crop farming, as well as energy. In May 2012, Shell won the contract to develop the Yuzivska gas deposit (est. 4 trillion cubic meters) under Slavyansk in the east, and at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2013, it signed an agreement for shale gas

exploitation in the presence of Prime Minister Rutte and President Yanukovych. Chevron would follow soon. In February 2011, ExxonMobil already signed an agreement with Rosneft to explore deposits in the Sea of Azov and Crimea.²²

Ukraine's high-tech aerospace, helicopter and marine engine firms, on the other hand, were not deemed worthy of attention from the West, even though they would be critically affected by an opening to the EU; nor were its heavy industries, which, clearly, were to be swept away. What happens when an ageing industrial infrastructure, highly dependent on cheap energy, is exposed to competition, whilst losing its energy supplier, Russia, had been amply demonstrated in the case of Avtovaz, the Ukrainian branch of Lada passenger cars. In 1991, it produced 156,000 cars (around half of capacity), dwindling to 57,000 in 1995 and then collapsing to 7,000 in 1996, leading to its temporary closure. In 1999, production was resumed at a much lower level.²³ This was only a taste of what the free trade provisions of the EU Association Agreement and the DCFTA would achieve across the Ukrainian economy.

Not surprisingly then, Ukraine was now openly hesitating: as EU external relations adviser Pedro Serrano testified, 'the "first inklings" of trouble from the Ukrainian side came in September 2013, when the President [Yanukovych] indicated that "it would be difficult for him to sign the DCFTA"'.²⁴ The fate of Ukraine's industry was obviously a key concern. The DCFTA's provisions for a sweeping liberalisation acquire their full significance in the context of the top-secret negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) then in progress.²⁵ In the run-up to the envisaged signing of the EU Association Agreement at Vilnius, the Netherlands, and probably Germany, reciprocated Yanukovych's hesitations, which had been the topic of discussion in the Ukrainian press long before, but somehow escaped EU attention,²⁶ and contemplated withholding their signatures. In mid-October, the Netherlands asked Berlin to join it in rejecting Ukrainian association if Kiev still did not meet EU criteria on liberalisation, property and civil rights.²⁷ The Baltic bloc, on the other hand, not only stuck to association, but also were keen on pursuing the option of Ukraine's EU membership.²⁸

So whilst Yanukovych suggested 'trilateral meetings with Russia in order to clarify the consequences of the DCFTA',²⁹ the EU proposed a straightforward neoliberal deal with important defence and foreign policy provisions. NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen did not fail to note in January 2014 that an Association Agreement with Ukraine would be a huge boost to 'Euro-Atlantic security'.³⁰ However, as Richard Sakwa notes, this was the first time in the history of EU (or NATO) enlargement, that the bloc encountered opposition from an external power.³¹ Armenia had already made itself ineligible for membership in either EU or NATO by acceding to the Eurasian Union in September 2013.³² Undaunted, the EU undertook, in the words of Elena Korosteleva, a 'moderate but miscalculated campaign to accelerate or arguably compel Ukraine to a decision over the [Association Agreement] at the Vilnius summit'.³³ Even the demand that Yuliya Tymoshenko, who urged Yanukovych to sign the agreement from her jail cell, be released, was in fact soft-pedalled, because the priority lay with incorporating Ukraine into the Western sphere of influence.³⁴ The deepening energy interconnections between the EU and Russia, about to be enlarged by a southern gas link, only added urgency to this objective, but also opened up the EU's differences with the United States.

The 'new Great Game' behind the anti-Putin campaign

When Vladimir Putin returned to the Russian presidency in 2012, the West's frustration over what had been achieved with interim president Dmitry Medvedev was mixed with fury over the prospect of having a tougher opponent in the Kremlin again. Medvedev was seen as representing a more pliant, potentially Western-oriented fraction in the Russian state class. Moscow had actually been courted by a 're-set' under Obama's first-term secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, who may have been softened up by donations to the Clinton Foundation by the Russian state-owned nuclear company, Rosatom. Come 2012, however, it was obvious that the former chairman of Gazprom's term in the Kremlin had in fact coincided with deepening the EU's dependence on Russian gas with work on the compressor station on the Russian end of South Stream beginning in December 2012,³⁵ while Russia also 'worked to expand its ... military footprint across Central Asia ... *It was like a modern-day version of the "Great Game"*'.³⁶ No wonder that in hindsight Hillary Clinton considered the re-set with Moscow a sign of weakness.

The grand master of the United States' modern-day Great Game strategy, Zbigniew Brzezinski, updated it for the Obama team in his 2008 work, *Second Chance* (after years of isolation following the Iraq disaster and the War on Terror). It restated the case for an anti-Russian policy he had made in *The Grand Chessboard* a decade earlier. Brzezinski now mocked the painful timidity of Bush Senior's 'Chicken Kiev' speech in August 1991, when the president had wisely warned against Ukraine going down the path of 'suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred', contrasting it with his proposal to organise covert support for secessionism among the USSR's non-Russians as Carter's national security adviser in the late 1970s.³⁷ In Hillary Clinton's State Department, it would fall to Victoria Nuland, the assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, to execute Brzezinski's policy as part of the neoconservative agenda drawn up by Wolfowitz, Krasner and Pascual, *et al.*³⁸ In a report to the European Parliament, also in 2008, Zeyno Baran, the director of the Eurasian Policy Center of the Hudson Institute in the United States recommended that the EU should assist in liberalising and modernising the Ukrainian grid instead of supporting South Stream. Tension in the Black Sea, she noted candidly, might serve the purpose of blocking that pipeline altogether.³⁹

Obviously, to stir up anti-Russian sentiment, especially in Europe, the line of attack would have to be 'civil society' and 'democracy', not pipeline politics. In January 2012, a new US ambassador in Moscow already caused a scandal by meeting with demonstrators protesting supposed election fraud, and a month later, Pussy Riot, the offshoot of an anarchist group called Voyna (War), performed a desecrating public act on the altar of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. The Church filed a complaint against them and three of the performers were convicted on account of hooliganism in July. They were promptly awarded prisoner of conscience status by Amnesty International under its new executive director, Suzanne Nossel, fresh from her role as deputy assistant secretary under Hillary Clinton. International show business figures also rallied to the cause. By now, what Adriel Kasonta and Richard Sakwa call an 'alliance of liberal internationalists, neocons, Atlanticists, Glucksmanites, German Greens, East European revanchists and normative Europeanists championed [EU and NATO] enlargement as a holy mission to tame the East'.⁴⁰ In their propaganda videos, Pussy Riot's profanities

against the Orthodox Patriarch were changed to anti-Putin lyrics so that the group could be cast as the victims of autocracy. Avaaz, the online protest organiser, joined in with calls to impose sanctions on 'Putin's powerful inner circle'.⁴¹

July 2012 also saw the first meeting of the 'Friends of Syria', after Russia and China refused to support a UN Security Council mandate for regime change in that country on the model of Libya. Hillary Clinton warned them they were going to pay a price for their obstinacy.⁴² True, the White House did not go along with calls to intervene in Syria, but the mood against Russia hardened further after Obama's re-election in November. In one of her last statements as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton called Russia's Eurasian development plans an attempt to re-'Sovietise' the region, which the United States should try to slow down, or better, prevent altogether.⁴³ When the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment (tying trade and arms control agreements with the USSR to Jewish emigration) was finally repealed in 2012, Congress promptly adopted the Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act (referring to the death in prison of a Russian lawyer) in order to keep the pressure on Moscow.⁴⁴

Hard on the heels of the already painful WikiLeaks exposure of US diplomatic cables from US embassies across the globe, which Hillary Clinton called 'an attack on the United States and the international community',⁴⁵ Edward Snowden exposed the global surveillance operations of the NSA and its partners in the 'Five Eyes' (comprising the Anglophone heartland), in May 2013.⁴⁶ When Russia granted Snowden asylum after the United States revoked his passport to prevent him from travelling to Latin America, Washington was profoundly displeased and in no mood to heed Putin's September 2013 op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, pleading for a joint stand against jihadist fighters in Syria.

Around 70 per cent of US intelligence gathering is subcontracted to the private sector, creating a powerful bloc of forces with an interest in the continuation of the surveillance state and warfare. Right next to the NSA premises in Fort Meade, Maryland, there is the business park where Booz Allen Hamilton (Snowden's employer), SAIC, Northrop Grumman and others concentrate their efforts under these programmes.⁴⁷ This complements secret agreements with companies like Facebook, Yahoo!, Apple, Google and Microsoft giving the US government access to their user bases for surveillance purposes. The social media operated by these companies have become a vast search engine for tracking down opposition and, alongside private operators and NGOs, form the backbone of Western manipulation of 'civil society'. The Soros network is the most important umbrella here, with its International Renaissance Foundation specifically targeting Ukraine.

Renaissance expected the Ukrainian presidential elections of 2015 to offer 'both a challenge and an opportunity'. The *challenge* was that 'pro-presidential political forces represent[ing] the combined and sometimes contradictory political views of large industrial capital interested in the European market [are faced with] a Russia-oriented leftist population, mostly conservative (neo-Soviet) towards democratic reforms'. Filling the 'value and content vacuum' in Ukrainian politics with populist concepts was risky; instead, politics should be transformed into a 'competition of platforms' that would 'make elections and politics issue-based'. The *opportunity* lay in creating the 'Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership', a 'voice of civil society in support of Ukraine's European

choice' linking up with the various committees and platforms disseminating the idea of a Western turn. Resisting Russian influence and preventing Ukrainian membership of the Eurasian Customs Union were Renaissance priorities.⁴⁸

The mobilisation of civic minorities through Western NGOs received a welcome boost in June 2013 when the Russian parliament adopted a conservative members' law against exposing children to the promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relationships'. The Western media chose to interpret this as jeopardising the safety of gay athletes at the Sochi Winter Olympics in February 2014.⁴⁹ Promoting the cause of the Association Agreement with Ukraine was now openly linked to destabilising the Putin presidency. As the president of the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, Carl Gershman, stated in September 2013, Ukraine was 'the biggest prize' and securing its allegiance to the West would put Putin 'on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself'.⁵⁰

At the September 2013 G20 summit in St Petersburg, the United States emerged as an overt antagonist of Russia, calling for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics. Also, to force Yanukovich's hand and make him sign in Vilnius, the Americans were playing with warrants for the oligarch perceived to be holding the keys to the president's office, Dmytro Firtash, resident in Vienna at the time. After Yanukovich had indicated he might not sign, a US arrest warrant was issued for supposed bribes paid by Firtash in India; it was promptly suspended when Yanukovich indicated to Victoria Nuland that he would sign after all. After Vilnius, Firtash would be arrested again and was kept on bail until an Austrian judge threw out the case.⁵¹

The events of February 2014

There had been warning signs for at least two years 'that if Yanukovich carried on looting the country in the way he was, the lid was just going to blow off'.⁵² So when the Ukrainian president, seven days before the signing ceremony in Vilnius, announced he would postpone it, popular exasperation over oligarchic rule exploded. It blended with an Ukrainian nationalist insurrection concentrated in the west of the country.

Preparation for popular mobilisation to back up a turn to the West had been in progress throughout 2013. In its planning document of that year Soros' Renaissance Foundation identified a growing movement driven by 'citizen demand for participation in decision-making at all levels', which would create a favourable terrain for NGOs seeking to achieve democratisation through an 'active civil society'. In practice, of course, this meant limited sovereignty and 'market democracy': 'In concert with *the pressure generated by the Ukrainian government's European obligations* upon which hinges the prospect of an Association Agreement with the European Union, this opens a window of opportunity for *protecting and promoting open society values*.'⁵³

The US embassy in Kiev had been training activists in the use of social media to mount protest since the spring. On 20 November, a federalist member of the Ukrainian parliament from Dnepropetrovsk, Oleg Tsarev, took the floor to reveal that

with support and direct participation of the US Embassy in Kiev, a 'TechCamp' project is under way in which preparations are being made for a civil war in Ukraine. The

'TechCamp' project prepares specialists for information warfare and for the discrediting of state institutions, using modern media—potential revolutionaries for organizing protests and the toppling of the Government. This project is overseen by and currently under the responsibility of the US Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey R. Pyatt.⁵⁴

Eric Zuesse actually tracked down the advert of the US embassy in Kiev of 1 March 2013, which announced a 'TechCamp Kyiv 2.0 to Build Technological Capacity of Civil Society'. As Tsarev told parliament, federalist activists, posing as IT specialists, had gained access to the 'TechCamp' to hear American instructors explain how to use social networks and internet to steer public opinion and activate protest, with examples from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. 'A total of five events have been held so far: About 300 people have been trained as operatives, who are now active throughout Ukraine. The last conference took place on 14 November 2013 ... inside the US Embassy'.⁵⁵

In a speech before a Washington business conference sponsored by the US-Ukraine Foundation and Chevron in December 2013, Victoria Nuland revealed the US had already poured five billion dollars into Ukraine for 'democracy promotion'.⁵⁶ US-sponsored items included the slick video, 'I am Ukrainian', viewed by millions and on which Larry Diamond of the National Endowment for Democracy had been a consultant, and Center UA, an Ukrainian umbrella organisation of NGOs. Center UA was founded by O. Rybachuk, state secretary for European integration under Yushchenko. It received most of its funding from Pact Inc., financed in turn by the US Agency for International Development, a 'strategic external partner' of the Renaissance Foundation. The Omidyar Network of eBay founder-owner Pierre Omidyar, also contributed, as did George Soros and the NED.⁵⁷ This documents how the ground for regime change was being prepared well before Yanukovych stepped back from the impossible choice he was invited to make at Vilnius.

The EU, too, was part of the process. It supplied €496 million for 'front groups'. According to the Commission's own data, a total of €1.3 billion had been donated to Ukraine between 2007 and 2014 for development and research and related projects. The European Endowment for Democracy, funded by the EU, several member states, and Switzerland, according to its executive chairman, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff MEP, also supported 'civil society', i.e. blogs, newsletters and radio broadcasting, as well as emergency relief.⁵⁸ The British embassy in Kiev in early 2013 initiated a communication strategy aimed at winning the Ukrainian population for the EU and the Association Agreement and DCFTA in particular. Involving business organisations, NGOs and other EU embassies, the campaign, 'Stronger Together', was launched on 10 September in Kiev. It was followed by 'DCFTA Road Shows' and accompanied by a series of TV programmes in which Ukrainian expatriates explained the attractions of life in the EU.⁵⁹ The Netherlands was a partner in 'Stronger Together' and also the biggest donor to Hromadske TV, an internet station live-streaming images of the demonstrations, thus ensuring a constant flow of new recruits to occupied squares in all the major cities.⁶⁰ A German official who headed the European Centre for Modern Ukraine from 2011 to 2014, an institution intended to smooth Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU, claimed that Soros money actually allowed people at Maidan to earn more in two weeks demonstrating, than in four weeks of work in west Ukraine.⁶¹

Ultra-nationalists and fascists hijack the protests

When Yanukovych announced he would not sign the EU Agreement and instead accepted the Russian counteroffer of \$15 billion and preferential gas tariffs, the acting leader of Yuliya Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, called for protests (dubbed #Euromaidan) on his Twitter account. It was widely expected that the 2015 presidential election would be won, easily and without irregularities, by the opposition, probably with the boxer, Vitaly Klitschko, as its candidate. Washington, however, was not keen on this prospect, because Klitschko and members of his UDAR party had been groomed by the German CDU's Konrad Adenauer Foundation. With people out in the street, Klitschko now joined the other opposition groups, including Svoboda under Tyahnybok (the only real party organisation).⁶² In fact, the key oligarchs behind the Party of Regions, Firtash (who controlled 30 MPs) and Akhmetov (60 MPs) were hedging their bets too; months before the coup they had begun financing the opposition. Not only had the Yanukovych 'Family' alienated such original backers, the US State Department had in fact threatened both men with sanctions if they did not collaborate.⁶³

After initial protests dwindled towards the end of the month, an ill-judged attempt by the Kiev police to clear the square backfired. Rumours that the police attack had been ordered by the head of the presidential administration, Lyovochkin, as a way of escalating the situation, began to circulate as the major oligarch-owned TV channels reported the dispersal of 30 November from the demonstrators' perspective.⁶⁴ Though opposition politicians knew of the riot police's plans, they decided not to make them known so as to let heavy-handed police tactics provoke popular outrage.⁶⁵ When a crowd of half a million returned to Maidan, the Lenin statue off the main street was pulled down by anti-Russian extremists. In response to the government's reliance on Berkut riot police, they now began forming armed groups, of which the most radical ones were Ukrainian fascists who, in their own riot gear, began attacking the police.⁶⁶

If the documents of the Dutch Foreign Ministry are anything to go by, Western capitals followed the progress of the demonstrations closely. In January, the demonstrations were no longer as large as in November and December, and the mass uprising necessary to depose a duly elected Ukrainian president before the end of his term was not yet in sight.⁶⁷ Following violence on the weekend of 10 and 11 January, Yanukovych, confident of the power of the Party of Regions, decreed severe anti-demonstration laws which also criminalised peaceful protest. The West promptly called on Yanukovych not to use the army against demonstrators.⁶⁸ Now, however, 'the further course of the protest movement began to be largely determined by extreme right-wing groups'.⁶⁹ They were steadily reinforced from the west of the country; only 14 per cent of the more than 3,000 separate 'protest events' recorded by Volodymyr Ishchenko took place in the capital, two-thirds occurred in the west and the centre. Of the confrontational and violent incidents, almost as many were recorded in the western regions as in the centre and in Kiev together.⁷⁰ These western nationalist centres of revolt 'were not just local points to mobilize people for participation in Kiev tent camp[s] and rallies', Ishchenko observes. 'No less important was local mobilization against regional governors appointed by the president, and members of regional councils from the Party of Regions.'

It was in the western regions that Maidan protesters *first seized massive amounts of weaponry* from local law enforcement which were later used in clashes with the police in Kiev. It was in the western regions that Yanukovych first lost control, not in Kiev. In late January 2014 People's Councils (*narodni rady*) were created by local activists, opposition parties' leaders, local council members (including Svoboda party) accompanied by the occupation of the state administration buildings.⁷¹

In Lviv, the city hall was stormed by armed men, Nazi banners were hoisted, and a military arsenal looted. New administrative structures were erected in Lviv oblast, Volyn and Ternopil, all three oblasts in which Svoboda had obtained majorities in 2009–10. These regional centres of revolt sent units to Maidan and assisted in the rapid escalation of violence.⁷² It has been claimed that Yanukovych had cultivated Svoboda as the scarecrow opposition to his rule, in the hope of securing his own re-election by mobilising anti-fascist sentiment. Whatever the truth of this, there is no doubt the Far Right was present and active in the west country since 1991.⁷³

In the night of 19–20 January, violent clashes erupted, creating an explosive situation. Yanukovych now extended a hastily issued amnesty law protecting demonstrators, so that it also covered the riot police. Another decree belatedly designated NGOs financed from abroad as foreign agents, after the Russian example. On 24 January the president offered to dismiss the Azarov government, appoint Yatsenyuk as prime minister and Klitschko as his deputy, but the opposition considered this insufficient.⁷⁴ Four days later parliament retracted most of the anti-demonstration legislation and Azarov resigned, along with his cabinet. By now, the demonstrations had descended into outright street fighting, as armed fascists, Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and football hooligans had taken over what had begun (and is still celebrated in Western media) as a 'Revolution of Dignity'. 'Numerically', writes Ishchenko, 'the far right had a minor presence, but they were dominant on the political and ideological level'.⁷⁵

Towards mid-February, the forces intent on seizing power were growing bolder. Since the opposition politicians appeared to have no real plan, the armed groups moved to occupy the vacuum.⁷⁶ Militants were organised along quasi-military lines into 42 self-defence squadrons, each called *sotnia* (a Ukrainian term for 'hundred'), most of which were under the command of the 'self-defence committee' led by Andriy Parubiy. The squadrons had the task of issuing passes, escorting demonstrators and weeding out '*titushki*', unemployed lower-class youth, used by the government as police provocateurs. They also attacked trade unionists and anarchists among the demonstrators with axes and clubs.⁷⁷

Four neo-Nazi paramilitary groups at Maidan were joined together under the umbrella of 'Right Sector' (Pravyi Sektor), constituted five days after the first demonstration.⁷⁸ Dmytro Yarosh, leader of Tryzub (Trident, after Stepan Bandera's militia), was put in charge of Right Sector as a whole (a vast portrait of Bandera adorned the podium at Maidan). The others were UNA-UNSO, the White Hammer; and the Social-National Assembly, characterised by Gordon Hahn as 'ultra-fascist'.⁷⁹ Patriot of Ukraine, the paramilitary arm of the SNPU/Svoboda, was also at the Maidan. It was commanded by Andriy Biletskiy, a pupil of Parubiy's (he went on to become the commander of the infamous Azov Battalion, which inherited the SNPU's and Patriot of Ukraine's Wolf's

Hook symbol),⁸⁰ A 'Gladio'-style unit of veterans of the Israeli Givati infantry brigade also took part in the fighting. Led by a man going by the pseudonym 'Delta', who had settled in Ukraine as a businessman, these 'Blue Helmets of Maidan' operated under the command of Svoboda.⁸¹

The turning point that definitively transformed the Maidan demonstrations into an armed coup came on 18 February. Four days earlier, the government had softened, releasing 234 demonstrators and promising an amnesty for all criminal acts committed during the revolt. On 18 February, however, right-wing radicals marching along Institutska Street began to throw Molotov cocktails at the police units guarding parliament, burned the Party of Regions headquarters, and killed one of its employees. The main demonstration made no effort to hold back the radicals and it was clear that the presence of armed fascists was now integral to the demonstrations.⁸² Firearms had long been in evidence and on 18 February, an additional arsenal of 1,200 pieces, including Kalashnikovs, was seized by insurgents in Lviv; some of this was recovered, the rest was dispatched to Kiev.⁸³ As evening fell, 28 people had been shot dead, including ten riot police.

The official Western position throughout has been that the police shot dead demonstrators.⁸⁴ However, the angle from which the shots were fired indicated they came from the Philharmonic Hall, where Parubiy was in command. No Right Sector activists were among the victims.⁸⁵ Two days later, violence dramatically escalated, when at least 39 protesters and again 17 police were killed by sniper fire from Hotel Ukraina and other locations controlled by Parubiy's self-defence squadrons. A leaked phone call by the Estonian foreign minister, Urmas Paet, to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton would later (26 February) confirm the suspicion that the sniper fire came from the opposition.⁸⁶ In a detailed investigation, Ivan Katchanovski concludes that

the massacre was a false flag operation, which was rationally planned and carried out with a goal of the overthrow of the government and seizure of power. [The investigation] found various evidence of the involvement of an alliance of the far right organizations, specifically the Right Sector and Svoboda, and oligarchic parties, such as Fatherland. Concealed shooters and spotters were located in at least 20 Maidan-controlled buildings or areas.⁸⁷

One of the constituent groups of Right Sector, the White Hammer, later claimed it left the bloc in protest over the shootings.⁸⁸ Besides killing riot police and special forces, the snipers also specifically targeted demonstrators of nationalities other than Ukrainian, such as Poles and Jews; on the basis of detailed evidence Katchanovski concludes that these killings were intended to mobilise support for the revolt in Israel, Poland and the United States.⁸⁹ A trial in July 2015, intended to convict two Berkut riot police for the killing of 39 demonstrators on 20 February, collapsed when the brother of a slain victim testified that shots had been fired, not from Berkut positions, but from opposition-controlled Hotel Ukraina. The bullet calibre was the same for 16 more victims shot from the same angle.⁹⁰

The American riposte to EU mediation and the coup

Amidst the mounting violence, the EU briefly departed from the Washington scenario when it decided to intervene and attempt to restore calm. We know that on 24

January, Dutch Foreign Secretary Timmermans called his Ukrainian counterpart as well as Klitschko. According to preparatory notes for the discussions between Timmermans and the German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the day before, we also know that Germany and the Netherlands remained in contact with both the government and the opposition and continued to engage in 'people-to-people contacts', code for subsidies to NGOs and 'civil society' organisations. Yet Berlin, as would become clear, wanted a peaceful solution and was concerned not to antagonise Russia over Ukraine.⁹¹

Timmermans was also among the many EU politicians who were cheerleaders of the Maidan, as was Steinmeier's predecessor, Guido Westerwelle, whilst the former Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt, alongside the president of the Liberal International, Dutch MEP (of Far Right background), Hans van Baalen, urged the crowd on to 'victory'. Outgoing EU Commission President Barroso called on the demonstrators to 'have the courage to go out and fight'.⁹² That many neo-fascists from EU countries flocked to the Maidan did not deter Western political leaders. Sweden's foreign secretary, Carl Bildt, declared on the P1 channel of Swedish radio that Svoboda (the party that the European Parliament in 2012 had condemned as 'xenophobic, anti-Semitic and racist' and the World Jewish Congress had demanded be outlawed) 'are European democrats aspiring to values that are also ours'.⁹³

Such rhetoric apart, it was now evident that the EU was unprepared for what might happen after Vilnius. 'When Russian hostility became explicit', the British House of Lords EU Committee later commented, the EU had only 'a very small window of opportunity to act'. That action was taken on the night of 20–21 February, when the foreign ministers of Germany, Poland and France (Steinmeier, Sikorski and Laurent Fabius) flew to Kiev to negotiate a deal with Yanukovich and prevent the crisis from getting completely out of hand.⁹⁴ On the afternoon of 21 February, they signed a deal including an immediate ceasefire, an investigation into the violence, and renunciation of force by all sides, to be followed by a return to the 2004 constitution and the formation of a government of national unity and new elections. The agreement was signed by the EU ministers (with a French official standing in for Fabius, who was due in China), Yanukovich, Yatsenyuk, Klitschko and Tyagnybok. A Russian diplomat, V. Lukin, was present as Putin's special representative. Contrary to prevailing myths about Russian intentions and actions, according to Sikorski it was Putin who prevailed on Yanukovich to sign the agreement.⁹⁵

No US representative participated in these negotiations or signed the agreement and that, it turned out, was the whole problem. Besides the inevitable US senator, John McCain, photographed standing next to fascist leader Tyagnybok, Assistant Secretary of State Nuland was busy stage-managing the eventual takeover with Ambassador Pyatt. Nuland was the most militant neoconservative in the Obama administration, in frequent touch with the circle around NATO commander, General Philip Breedlove. Whilst Pyatt's embassy supervised the training of activists, Nuland had visited Yanukovich three times before the demonstrations began to prevail on him to sign the Association Agreement, highlighting the importance Washington attached to it. Once Yanukovich stepped back in Vilnius, both the NGO network trained by the US embassy and the armed ultras swung into action.

In her intercepted phone call with Pyatt, Nuland expresses her preference for Pinchuk protégé Yatsenyuk ('Yats') as the successor to Yanukovich, whilst ruling out

Klitschko ('Klitsch'), whom Yatsenyuk 'should talk to four times a week', but who was otherwise unacceptable to the United States, as was Tyagnybok. In this conversation Nuland not only made the infamous 'f**k the EU' comment, indicating her estimation of Europe's weight in world affairs, but also told Pyatt that Jeffrey Feltman would 'glue' the coup at the United Nations. Feltman, a former colleague of Nuland's as assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, had helped line up Arab leaders for the NATO regime change in Libya in 2011 and had been appointed undersecretary general for political affairs at the UN in July 2012. So a US diplomat would be briefing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Ukraine.⁹⁶

Thus, whilst EU ministers worked out an agreement with Yanukovych (amidst general support for the Maidan movement), the coup in February was prepared and engineered by the United States. The Russians were in no doubt about this. As Putin explained in a documentary on Rossiya 1 news channel in March 2015, US agencies were the masterminds behind the coup and had been training Ukrainian ultras in the west of the country, in Poland, and 'to some extent' in Lithuania.⁹⁷ The final planning meeting, in which the armed ultras were given the go-ahead, took place in the German embassy in Kiev on the evening of Thursday 20 February. So even before Foreign Secretary Steinmeier had begun the negotiations with Yanukovych, his own ambassador hosted a meeting including US Ambassador Pyatt and other NATO diplomats, at which Andriy Parubiy, the head of the armed wing of the insurgency, was also present. Appearing in military fatigues and balaclava, the man responsible for the deadly shootings that day and on the 18th threatened that 'if Western governments did not take firmer action against Yanukovych, the whole process could gain a very threatening dimension'.⁹⁸ This was no empty threat, because the Lviv arsenal had been dispatched to Kiev, although Parubiy later claimed none of these weapons had actually reached the capital. In fact, the looting of arms caches in Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk was one of the reasons for the refusal of the riot police to continue the fight. They 'were ready to disperse protesters when the latter were armed with sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails, but they were not ready to die for Yanukovych'.⁹⁹

The demonstrators at the Maidan, meanwhile, were in no mood to accept any deal with Yanukovych because of the mass shootings, which they had been told were the government's responsibility. Therefore, it was easy for one of Parubiy's squadron leaders, Volodymyr Parasyuk, commander of a sniper unit that had actually killed demonstrators and police on the 20th, to threaten that if Yanukovych did not step down by Saturday, they would depose him by force. Faced with these angry crowds upon their return, opposition politicians, who Sikorski had persuaded to accept the agreement at the presidential palace, executed a U-turn. Indeed Parasyuk demanded they retract their consent, whilst Yarosh read out to the crowd a list of arms they had available to back up the demand that Yanukovych resign on Saturday 22 February.¹⁰⁰

The police, which had already lost 30 dead to sniper fire, feared for a bloodbath should the Kalashnikovs from Lviv turn up in Kiev. They were also wary of a passage in the EU-brokered agreement that referred to the investigation of those responsible for the killings, suspecting that a desperate Yanukovych might sacrifice them to stay in power. In the afternoon of the 21st, riot police commanders called the interior ministry for their orders, but there were none. Instead, they were offered safe passage out of

Kiev with their men. As a result, more than 5,000 Berkut riot police, Alfa special forces and others were escorted out of the capital in buses. Sikorski, upon leaving the palace where the agreement with Yanukovych had been signed, recorded his amazement at the sight.¹⁰¹ The next day, Saturday 22 February, the insurgents were free to take control of the capital and occupy parliament. Lenin statues across the west and centre of the country were torn down.

Yanukovych had left Kiev by helicopter in the evening of the 21st to attend a Party of Regions conference in Kharkov, which called on local councils to take back power. However, Russian intelligence got wind that Ukrainian ultras were out to assassinate him. As Putin related in the *Rossiya 1* documentary in March, he ordered the Russian security services and the Defence Ministry to protect the Ukrainian president's life. Only when it became clear to Yanukovych that he was under serious threat did he consent to Russian protection (his private possessions had already been dispatched to Russia though). Having ended up in Crimea first, he was then flown to Rostov in a private jet, owned, ironically perhaps, by Poroshenko's conglomerate, Ukrprominvest. From Rostov, he called for Russia to intervene and restore him to power as the elected president. So if Moscow had had any intention to 'invade', as the NATO war party never tired of claiming, this would have been its chance, because the legitimate head of state was asking for it.¹⁰²

Thus, events culminated in 'a perfectly executed regime change', Diana Johnstone writes.

The crowds of protesters, whose precise demands were never clarified and so could not be met, provided the 'democratic' excuse for overthrowing an elected government, while the mysterious snipers provided the veil of confusion needed to enable an illegal, unconstitutional coup d'état to take place.¹⁰³

Even so, Manlio Dinucci notes, an armed takeover would have had no chance had not NATO 'co-opted a large part of the top echelons of the Ukrainian military hierarchy, training them for years at NATO's Defence College and drilling them in "peace operations"'. The military obeyed NATO warnings to remain neutral only to find itself under the command of Parubiy, appointed secretary of the NSDC, and Admiral Igor Tenyukh, linked to Svoboda and appointed defence minister.¹⁰⁴ According to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, Obama had first called Putin to urge him to support the deal between Yanukovych and the opposition; now Russia called in vain on the EU to enforce that very deal.¹⁰⁵ Both Brussels and Washington (which had not been a party to the agreement and had instead plotted the overthrow of the president) promptly recognised the new government, as if a regular cabinet reshuffle had occurred.¹⁰⁶

Regime change and international realignment

On 22 February, with the government gone and armed insurgents strolling through the debating chamber, the Kiev parliament deposed Yanukovych, appointing Turchynov as acting president. Yatsenyuk, also of Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party, was made prime minister: Given his minimal public standing,¹⁰⁷ 'Yats' only found himself in his new post

as a result of being the front man of Pinchuk, the oligarch most favoured by the West and the United States. Apart from Svoboda with its west Ukrainian support base, none of the political groups active in the Maidan revolt had much stable support anyway.¹⁰⁸

The new government was unconstitutional on several counts. Yanukovych had not yet left the country and declared on TV he was not stepping down; the constitutional requirement for the impeachment, a three-quarters majority of the full house, was not met. The Firtash and Akhmetov factions of the Party of Regions remained divided, although both men at the decisive moment apparently withdrew support from Yanukovych. Two days after appointing the new government, parliament dismissed the Supreme Court. As was to be expected, large sections of opinion in the Russian-Ukrainian areas refused to recognise the legality of the transfer of power; none more so than Crimea and the Donbass.¹⁰⁹ The Party of Regions was thrown into disarray. 'The sudden departure of Yanukovych and his supporters led the party to disintegrate into several factions associated with large business groups', writes Serhiy Kudelia. 'Each of these groups had its own interests in the Donbass; some were more insistent than others, and made tacit alliances with separatist leaders.'¹¹⁰ In mid-March Firtash was arrested in Vienna on account of the US extradition request and freed on a bail of \$125 million, the highest in Austrian history. Yet, that very month he was still in the position to invite Poroshenko and Klitschko to the Austrian capital and fix the presidential election planned for May.¹¹¹

Of Ukraine's oligarchs, Kolomoisky was among the big winners of the coup, along with Pinchuk, but coming from a much more precarious position. There had been speculation in the Ukrainian media that Yanukovych had considered making Kolomoisky an 'Ukrainian Khodorkovsky' after the government had blocked his attempt to turn Ontobet Promotions' control of Ukraine International Airlines (MAU) into full ownership. In fact, despite Russian pressure, Kolomoisky was left in possession of the Kremenchuk refinery, indicating that he somehow reached an understanding with the Party of Regions.¹¹² Even so, when the protests began, Kolomoisky threw his media weight behind them, partly out of revenge for the appointment of an Akhmetov crony from Donetsk as governor of Dnepropetrovsk. 'The elites of the region, which had run Ukraine for years, took this as an affront and looked out for opportunities to get their own back.'¹¹³

In the new, 21-strong Yatsenyuk cabinet, only two ministers hailed from the south and the east of Ukraine, the part traditionally voting for federalist candidates. Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian half of the country was effectively disenfranchised. Tymoshenko was released two days after the coup and the Ukrainian criminal code was promptly changed, so that the actions for which she had been imprisoned were no longer criminal offences and she could now run for the presidency in May.¹¹⁴ Svoboda politician Oleksandr Sich, who had stated before the European Parliament in February that 'a fascist dictatorship is the best way of governing a country', was made vice-premier.¹¹⁵ The ultra-nationalist and fascist profile of the coup government was further accentuated when Klitschko, whose name had already been crossed out by Victoria Nuland, supported but declined to enter the cabinet for fear that his UDAR party might suffer from the measures it was going to take. As a result, Svoboda, with only 8 per cent of the seats in parliament, got five out of 21 cabinet seats and five governorships, covering one-fifth of the country. Critical posts

in the national security and defence sectors, as well as the position of prosecutor-general, thus landed with Svoboda and Right Sector.¹¹⁶

The key economic ministries, finance and energy, went to Kolomoisky men; the oligarch himself, one of whose prize ideas was a wall between Ukraine and Russia, would be appointed governor of Dnepropetrovsk. The IMF dictated the new regime's economic programme, including a 5 per cent cut in social security and education and a 7 per cent cut in health magnified by the 49 per cent inflation of 2014. In the spring of 2014, 10 per cent of civil servants were made redundant, pensions were lowered, and child support was abolished. The environmental protection budget was almost halved, and the minimum wage was frozen, pushing it below the survival income in real terms.¹¹⁷

No appointment was more important than that of Andriy Parubiy to the post of secretary of the National Security and Defence Committee (NSDC, RNBOU in Ukrainian). This is the position that oversees the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement, and National Security and Intelligence. Yanukovych had already upgraded the NSDC when he appointed Andriy Klyuyev, a Donetsk oligarch, as secretary.¹¹⁸ Now, the co-founder of the fascist SNPU (precursor of Svoboda), commander of its militia, Patriot of Ukraine, and head of the armed uprising, who had negotiated the seizure of power with the US and NATO ambassadors on 20 February, was placed at its head. Dmytro Yarosh, leader of Right Sector (and of the Right Sector delegation in the Kiev parliament), was offered the post of deputy, but he declined. The NSDC is formally headed by the president, but it is run by the secretariat with a staff of 180 people, including defence, intelligence and national security experts. In other words, Parubiy was the highest official in charge of all-round national security from the seizure of power until three weeks after the downing of MH17. He resigned on 7 August 2014, ostensibly over disagreements about a new ceasefire, on the same day that NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was in Kiev for a few hours, as will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#).

Arsen Avakov was appointed minister of the interior and made commander of the volunteer militias recruited from the Maidan self-defence units. Avakov joined Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party in 2010 and as administrator in the Kharkov area had built a reputation of working with football hooligans to handle opponents. In 2012, Italy had him put on the Interpol list for fraud but, after he was elected to the Ukrainian parliament, the warrant for his arrest was lifted. He was noted for his frequently abusive comments on Facebook and, while a minister, was convicted of war crimes in absentia by a Russian court on 9 July 2014. Both he and his close associate and spokesman, Anton Gerashchenko, are also members of the NSDC. They would be the first to claim direct Russian involvement in the downing of Flight MH17.¹¹⁹

In the prevailing mood of Ukrainian nationalist triumphalism, parliament revoked the law of the second languages on 23 February, making Ukrainian the sole state language both at the federal and regional levels. However, given that the regime change was in the bag, Western politicians saw no need to provoke the Russian-Ukrainians unnecessarily and they pressed Turchynov not to sign it. Yet he kept the bill in abeyance until 28 February and, in the meantime, the damage was done. With armed gangs ransacking offices of the Party of Regions and the Communist Party and videos of officials thrown into garbage bins, beaten up, or worse, going viral online, fear among Russian-speakers

mounted. Estonian Foreign Minister Paet told Catherine Ashton of the atmosphere of intimidation, the beatings and nightly visits.¹²⁰ But the EU had other priorities.

The war party in the United States and NATO interpreted the seizure of power as a major blow to Russia's Eurasian project, including energy links with the EU, and now also forced France and Germany, whose governments had briefly strayed off the Atlanticist course, to fall back in line. This we know from the e-mails of the NATO commander, Philip Breedlove, hacked and leaked to the whistleblower site, DCLeaks.¹²¹ In an e-mail of 23 March, the RAND Corporation's former vice-president and air force expert, Natalie Crawford, conveyed to Breedlove her concern about EU recalcitrance, speaking of a 'time filled with tensions between the EU and the US about many issues, most prominently now Russia, the sanctions, the Ukraine, now talk about the Baltics'.¹²² Franco-German hesitations on 20–21 February proved short-lived anyway. The Polish foreign minister, Sikorski, had been present in negotiations with Yanukovych and in its deep involvement in the affairs of its neighbour, Poland had loyally observed the overarching Atlantic format. So once presented with the *fait accompli* of the coup, the EU dropped all reservations.

On 6 March, an EU summit agreed to have the political sections of the Association Agreement with Ukraine – the Preamble, and Titles I, II and VII – signed *before the elections*, ensuring that the Ukrainian electorate could not obstruct the political and defence realignment to the West even though electorates in the rest of the EU retain that prerogative, with the Dutch rejecting the agreement by a two-thirds majority in a referendum on 6 April 2016 (only to be ignored by the Rutte government). So much for the 'democracy' part of the market democracy project.¹²³ As to the 'market', it was made clear to Yatsenyuk that the Agreement would not be split in two halves; the DCFTA was an integral part of the agreement, even though it would be signed later. So no reservations about throwing open the country's economy were to be entertained.¹²⁴

After this initial success, important forces in the EU wanted to push for membership. Thus, Stefan Füle, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, explained in an interview to German weekly *Die Welt* that a true transformation of eastern Europe required enlargement.¹²⁵ But then, why give former Soviet republics the vote membership entailed if they could be incorporated as EU and NATO protectorates without one?

The secession of Crimea from Ukraine

The rapidity with which fascist gangs went on a rampage across Ukraine led Moscow to become seriously concerned about the implications for its strategically vital naval base in Crimea, Sebastopol, home to the Russian Black Sea fleet. Russia's concerns were only heightened when, on 1 March 2014, three former Ukrainian presidents, Kravchuk, Kuchma and Yushchenko, called on the coup government to cancel the Kharkov Agreements (under which the lease of Sebastopol had been extended from 2017 to 2042). Four days later, the secretariat of the parliament in Kiev prepared draft legislation to reinstate the goal of joining NATO as Ukrainian national strategy. On top of that, coup president Turchynov issued a statement that Ukraine was considering changing its neutral status.¹²⁶ The prospect of NATO naval units appearing in Sebastopol was no longer unthinkable with key security related posts in the coup government being occupied by anti-Russian

Ukrainian nationalists. These developments seemed set fair to turn the Black Sea into a Western preserve. Russian plans for the South Stream pipeline, on which Moscow and Gazprom had worked with European countries and partner companies for more than seven years, would also be thrown into jeopardy should NATO, instead of Russia, be able to project naval power from Sebastopol.

Crimea was far from an integral part of Ukraine: its ethnic composition was majority Russian; its original transfer to Soviet Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 had been disputed, 93 per cent of Crimeans voting had expressed their desire for a separate Crimean Republic in the January 1991 referendum, Crimean support for Ukrainian independence in December of that year had been lukewarm and, in May 1992, the peninsula had declared independence, though a referendum to confirm that declaration was not held in part thanks to the moderate response from President Kravchuk.¹²⁷ The institutions of self-government then created were scrapped by Kuchma in 1995 and though the 1996 constitution granted Crimea the status of an Autonomous Republic, tensions remained. As president, Yeltsin had been under constant pressure to demand the return of Crimea to the Russian Federation, but he expected the CIS to continue the Soviet-era defence and foreign policy, retaining Russia's pre-eminence.¹²⁸ In 2008, at the time of the Georgian war to recapture South Ossetia, polls revealed that 73 per cent of Crimeans were in favour of rejoining Russia.¹²⁹

The seizure of power in Kiev dramatised the situation and with the new language law looming, Crimea's parliament discussed holding a referendum on secession from Ukraine.¹³⁰ Russian special forces from the 12,500-strong Russian garrison stationed in the peninsula (half of what the lease agreement allowed), wearing no insignia to avoid immediate identification, secured the area to prevent incursions by Kiev forces or fascist irregulars. On 28 February, they occupied two airfields to prevent troops loyal to Kiev or volunteers from being flown in. The United States responded to these moves by activating its European Command (Eucom), which doubles as NATO Supreme Command. Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel suspended all military-to-military contacts with Russia, stepped up joint training of US air force units in Poland and raised the US share in NATO's air patrols over the Baltic. Breedlove meanwhile convened meetings with central and eastern European defence chiefs.¹³¹

Admiral Ihor Tenyukh, minister of defence of the coup regime, had been in charge of unsuccessful operations to block Russian access to its Black Sea naval base during the 2008 Georgian war over South Ossetia and knew the situation well. On 12 March, he reported that Ukraine had limited military means to enforce its sovereignty over Crimea and, in a report to Turchynov, described the army's combat readiness as dismal, with only 10 or 15 per cent of its air force capable of performing combat tasks.¹³² The next day, 13 March, Avakov, the interior minister, reconstituted the National Guard, abolished by Kuchma in 2000, as much to impose some discipline to the many criminal and fascist elements emerging from the armed units in the Maidan uprising as to compensate for the pitiful state of the regular army and have a motivated military force available.¹³³

To ward off military adventures by Ukraine and/or NATO, Russia deployed coastal defence missiles on the peninsula in such a way that they could be clearly seen from space by US spy satellites monitoring the area. Should the West still not get the message, Putin revealed in the *Rossiya 1* documentary in March 2015, Moscow was ready to arm

its nuclear weapons. Until now, the troops protecting Crimea had been labelled 'self-defence forces', but soon Putin forsook such coyness in the face of Western designs to humiliate Russia. Referring to the 1994 treaty under which Ukraine had exchanged its nuclear arsenal for a guarantee of its borders, the Russian president noted that it was Kiev's duty and national interest to protect the millions of Russians and Russian-speakers in the country, a key aspect of its territorial integrity. The failure to protect its citizens from ultra-nationalist gangs, Putin argued, forced Russia's hand. 'Considering the ethnic composition of the Crimean population, the violence there would have been worse [than in Kiev].'¹³⁴

Events now followed each other in quick succession. In the 16 March referendum, a majority voted for unification with Russia, although estimates as to the real turnout and majority numbers vary.¹³⁵ On 21 March, Crimea joined the Russian Federation as its 22nd republic and Sebastopol was added to the cities with federal status. Kiev responded by blocking the fresh water supply, destroying Crimea's 2014 rice harvest. On 25 March, Admiral Tenyukh was dismissed because he had not immediately withdrawn Ukrainian military units from the peninsula, with the telling result that 14,500 of Ukraine's 18,800 servicemen in Crimea joined the secession and incorporation into the Russian Federation. Tenyukh was replaced by Mykhailo Koval, commander of the Ukrainian border guard.¹³⁶ On 2 April, Russia abrogated the agreement over its naval base for which it had so far paid \$45 billion. Later that month, Moscow restored the nationality and language rights of the Tatars in Crimea, in line with Russian federalism, although Kiev mobilised its own Tatar extremists.¹³⁷

Contrary to the widely-peddled view that the incorporation of Crimea was a(nother) sign of Russian expansionism, it was a rupture in Russian foreign policy. Moscow took this step after an accumulation of precedents the West set in violating international obligations, stretching from the recognition of Kosovo in spite of UN resolutions stressing the integrity of Yugoslavia to the regime changes in Iraq and Libya. Russia actually referred to the July 2010 ruling by the International Court of Justice that there exists no prohibition in international law of declarations of independence, a ruling with which the Court dismissed Serbia's complaint over Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. Obama, speaking in Brussels in late March, chose to reply to Moscow's justification by a series of claims about Kosovo's 'careful cooperation with the United Nations and with [its] neighbours'. In fact, there had been neither a referendum nor cooperation, or it would have been covert collaboration with the United States.¹³⁸ The EU, meanwhile, expressed its indignation at the Crimean return to the Russian Federation while ignoring the violations of the Ukrainian constitution on which the new government rested and its dismissal of the Supreme Court. Heads of state and government solemnly protested against 'the illegal referendum in Crimea, which is in clear violation of the Ukrainian Constitution'.¹³⁹

Western economic warfare

The Western countries lost no time in imposing sanctions on Russia. On 6 March, ten days before the Crimean secession referendum, President Obama authorised the US Treasury Secretary in consultation with the State Department to impose travel bans

and asset freezes on those who 'asserted governmental authority in the Crimean region without the authorization of the Government of Ukraine'. They had allegedly 'undermine[d] democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine', a bold claim after the US-directed seizure of power in Kiev. The G8, planned for June 2014 in Sochi, was cancelled and Russia duly expelled from that body. The day after the secession referendum of 16 March, the United States, the EU and Canada, then under neoconservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, imposed the first round of specific punitive measures, targeting key figures associated with oil and gas.

A few hours later, Putin would sign a decree recognising Crimea as an independent entity. At the RAND Corporation, Natalie Crawford was not far off the mark when she e-mailed to Breedlove that 'This is like a public, international [war game]. This is a chess game where the players sit across from each other but neither has a view of the board' – by which she meant to say that no side in the conflict had 'a perfect understanding of what is happening OR what responses might be to any actions taken including some sort of escalation'.¹⁴⁰ On 19 March, Obama announced that the United States would make a concerted effort to isolate Russia economically and politically and make it a 'pariah state'; Hillary Clinton, who had left her post as secretary of state both to concentrate on her run for the US presidency and because of disagreement over whether or not to intervene in Syria over the Ghouta gas incident, compared the return of Crimea to Russia to 'what Hitler did back in the thirties'.¹⁴¹

The West's next moves were over Europe's dependence on Russian gas and they would result in the EU's own competition rules being used against EU interests. Already when the South Stream agreement with ENI of Italy was signed in 2007, the EU had been advised to use its antitrust legislation to sabotage Gazprom and Transneft's control over the planned Black Sea pipeline, which it did in the form of the 'Third Energy Package' in 2009. Ukraine and Romania in turn were encouraged to raise environmental and other objections to South Stream, which had worked well in at least delaying Nord Stream.¹⁴² At the time of the Kiev coup, commentators wondered to what extent shale gas from the United States might be used to offset Russian deliveries. LNG facilities planned in Florida and Maryland would have Europe as their primary market. True, Russia would be hard to beat on price, but Europe was more attractive as a market for US LNG exports than Asia and EU competition rules could be used to US advantage at Gazprom's expense.¹⁴³ When the US Senate voted a \$1 billion aid package for the Kiev coup regime on 27 March, the chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Mary Landrieu, noted that the Keystone XL pipeline would give Europe an alternative to Russian gas.¹⁴⁴ Initially, the Obama administration resisted LNG exports (and Keystone XL) on environmental grounds, but the secession of Crimea allowed it to reverse that policy.¹⁴⁵

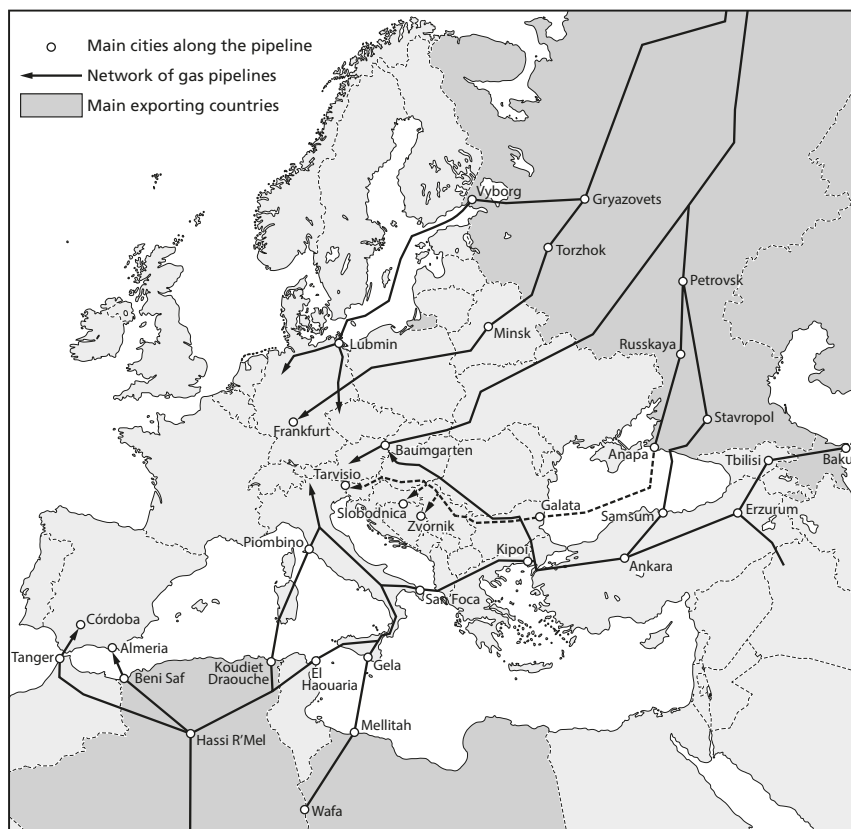
When Nord Stream became part of the Trans-European Networks (TEN), it was exempted from the Third Energy Package, but South Stream was not. It was effectively outlawed, because the 'Package', which for all practical purposes was directed against Gazprom, does not permit gas to be transported to the EU by the company producing it; despite most contracts with Gazprom having been signed before the Package came into force in 2009. Gazprom would now even be compelled to sell half of the gas piped through the *Ukrainian* grid to other companies, before it could enter the EU.¹⁴⁶

Obviously, the oligarchs involved in energy, such as Pinchuk or Kolomoiskiy, and the Naftogaz state monopoly which is their (contested) collective property, were only too glad over the opportunities this opened up to them, as were future Western investors. Indeed, Kiev soon began seizing Russian-owned energy assets in the country. On 22 April, the interior ministry confiscated the country's third largest refinery at Odessa (capacity, 70,000 barrels a day), which had been idle since February, after the Ukrainian company of a Yanukovych associate (who acquired it from Lukoil in 2013) failed to pay back a loan and ceded ownership to VTB, a Russian bank.¹⁴⁷

On 17 April the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution opposing the South Stream gas pipeline and recommended a search for alternative sources of gas. That same month, Russia filed a complaint with the WTO over the extraterritorial use of EU competition rules to force Gazprom to open up an eventual South Stream pipeline to competitors.¹⁴⁸ On 28 April, the United States imposed a ban on business transactions within its territory on seven Russian officials, including Igor Sechin, the CEO of Rosneft, the Russian state oil company, as well as Gennady Timchenko. Timchenko is the founder of one of the world's largest commodity traders, Gunvor; his Volga Group controls Stroytransgaz, the company entrusted with building the Bulgarian section of South Stream. Chernomorneftegas, the Crimean subsidiary of Naftogaz Ukrainy, had been placed under sanction before. Russia responded by imposing a ban on entry for 22 North Americans in March and 89 EU citizens in May.¹⁴⁹ The sanctions regime would be further expanded to full-scale economic warfare when Moscow concluded a decade of negotiations with Beijing over a massive gas contract (it would eventually be signed on 21 May).¹⁵⁰

In early June 2014, Bulgaria yielded to pressure to stop work on the South Stream pipeline. Three years earlier, a shale gas deposit allegedly offsetting the advantages of the Black Sea link with Russia had been discovered and was contracted to Chevron, but an anti-fracking movement which NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen blamed on 'sophisticated information and disinformation operations' by Moscow, defeated the project. Following elections in 2013 and capital injections by Russian corporations (including VTB bank) into Bulgaria, a new prime minister, Plamen Oresharski, found himself caught between pressure from a Far Right, pro-Moscow coalition partner and Gazprom on the one hand, and the EU and Washington on the other. Parliament approved South Stream two weeks after the reincorporation of Crimea, circumventing the EU's anti-trust legislation by renaming the pipeline a 'sea-land connection'. The European Commission then instructed Bulgaria to stop work on South Stream and proceeded to cut off tens of millions of much-needed regional development funds, whilst the US ambassador warned Bulgarian companies against working with Timchenko. A final visit of US senators John McCain and Ron Johnson, in combination with a mysterious run on the bank in which VTB had taken an interest, then led to the cancellation.¹⁵¹ Clearly the entire planned and existing pipeline grid between Russia, Turkey and Europe, depicted in [Figure 3.1](#), was now in jeopardy.

When Putin and his Austrian colleague, Heinz Fischer, met in June to confirm the deal between OMV and Gazprom, the US embassy in Vienna released a statement warning Austria that it should 'consider carefully whether today's events contribute to the effort [to maintain trans-Atlantic unity and discourage further Russian aggression]'.



3.1 *South Stream and existing gas pipelines from Russia, 2013.*

As Eric Draitser commented at the time, 'South Stream has become one of the primary battlegrounds in the economic war that the West is waging against Russia'. The sanctions are 'merely the window-dressing'.¹⁵² In the same month, the Kiev parliament adopted a bill under which up to 49 per cent of the country's gas pipeline network could be sold to foreign investors, offering US and EU companies a long-coveted chance to lay their hands on the transit system for Europe's gas supply.¹⁵³ However, by 16 July, when Washington imposed a new round of sanctions, the EU was no longer unanimous in following the US lead. Only the downing of Flight MH17 the next day overcame these hesitations.

Finally, in another act of economic warfare to safeguard against a future restoration of federalism in Ukraine and/or rapprochement with Russia, the United States effectively confiscated the Ukrainian gold reserve in early March. In the early hours of the 7th an unidentified transport aircraft at Kiev's Borispol airport took on board gold packed in 40 sealed boxes, amidst tight security. The account, originally posted by an anti-Maidan website in Zaporozhe, was checked with a source in the coup government,

who confirmed that on the order of acting prime minister Yatsenyuk, the Ukrainian gold reserve was being shipped to the United States. A week earlier, Yatsenyuk was still accusing Yanukovych of having stolen Ukraine's gold, which according to the estimate of the central bank, the National Bank of Ukraine, was worth an estimated 1.8 billion dollars. Now it turned out that the lot was still there and being transported to the United States, allegedly for fear of a Russian invasion.¹⁵⁴

We happen to have an idea of how much was transferred from other reported gold movements. More than 60 foreign governments deposit gold reserves at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. In late 2014, these deposits were included in the total Fed holdings of six thousand tons, valued then at \$8.2 trillion.¹⁵⁵ The matter became an issue in 2012, when concerns about German gold were publicly aired (almost half of German gold reserves, totalling €144 billion at the time, are stored in the United States). The euro crisis and a secret report by the Federal Audit Office raised doubts about whether the gold was properly accounted for. In 2007, a German delegation had been allowed into the building, and after intense negotiations, in 2011 another group obtained permission to see one of the seven vaults in which the country's gold was stored. However, the section in the report on what they found there, was blacked out.¹⁵⁶

The promise to begin to repatriate at least some of the gold from New York was only minimally fulfilled in the years that followed. The one substantive withdrawal was not by Germany, but by the Netherlands in the first half of 2014. The reason the German government did not press the United States on the matter was not the presumed logistical difficulty, but according to German bankers, diplomatic friction. Over 2014, the Netherlands, on the other hand, repatriated 122 tons; by October, the Fed balance was only 42 tons down, so in the course of the year there had been 80 tons added, into which the roughly 51 tons from Ukraine would certainly fit. However, when the New York Fed was asked whether it had taken custody of the Ukrainian gold, it would not confirm it because only the account holder can make such information public.¹⁵⁷

Expanding on the same information, Michel Chossudovsky cites the Gold Anti-Trust Action Committee (GATA) that the value and whereabouts of a country's gold reserves are among its closest held secrets and that Ukraine's gold in all probability had indeed ended up in New York. Reporting on the GATA dispatch, the Shanghai Metals Market quoted a report from the coup government in Kiev that 40 boxes containing Ukraine's gold reserves had indeed been flown to the United States. A Hong Kong-based hedge fund manager, William Kaye, noted in an interview that the new head of the National Bank of Ukraine, Stepan Kubiv, had been appointed on the orders of the United States, and shipping the gold across the Atlantic had been his first decision. The Ukrainian gold, according to Kaye, should be considered as having been confiscated, as had happened in the case of Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011. In his opinion, 'Ukraine will ... very likely never see that gold again'.¹⁵⁸

Thus the coup in Kiev in late February 2014, in close consultation with the US State Department and embassy, led to Ukraine's sovereignty being subordinated to the West. It dramatically raised the stakes in the encirclement of Russia that had been in the works right from the collapse of the USSR. If Georgia's war to recapture South Ossetia in 2008 did not cross the threshold of great power military confrontation, the seizure of power in Kiev certainly threatened to do so. The Association Agreement with the EU would

have surrendered Kiev's defence and arms procurement policy to NATO dictates, and its foreign policy aligned with the West's confrontation with the Eurasian/BRICS contender bloc, but Yanukovych stepped back in the end; the seizure of power then achieved these objectives by force, albeit at the price of breaking up the country. This takes us to the Ukrainian civil war that erupted in April/May and to the actual downing of Flight MH17 in July.

Notes

- 1 Yuliya Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation, transnationalisation of the state and the transnational capitalist class in post-1991 Ukraine' (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 2013), p. 132.
- 2 Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 56; Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2017, p. 47, citing Wikileaks documents.
- 3 Slawomir Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy: The Influence of Business Groups on Ukrainian Politics* [OSW Studies no. 42]. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2012, p. 71, see also pp. 50–1.
- 4 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 171.
- 5 Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 38.
- 6 Sergii Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters: a typology of oligarchs'. *Transit*, 45, 15 May 2014 (online); see Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, pp. 41–2.
- 7 Yurchenko, 'Capitalist bloc formation', p. 131.
- 8 The Dutch embassy courted controversy by advertising tax evasion opportunities in the Netherlands to Ukrainian oligarchs. Willem Bos, 'Referendum associatieverdrag Europese Unie: Links en het Oekraïne-referendum'. *Solidariteit*, 2016 (online); De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 90.
- 9 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 56, 59.
- 10 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 22, 72, 57; Joost Niemöller, *MH17: De Doofpotdeal* [preface K. Homan]. Amsterdam: Van Praag, 2014, p. 181.
- 11 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 61.
- 12 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 11.
- 13 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp. 54–5; Hans van Zon, 'EU-Associatieakkoord verdeelt Oekraïne'. *Sargasso*, January 2016 (online).
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- 15 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 65, 71.
- 16 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine* [EU Committee, 6th Report of Session 2014–2015], 2015, p. 54.
- 17 Jupiter Broadcasting, 'The truth of MH17: unfilter 107', 25 July 2014 (online); Arno Wellens, 'Stop het associatieverdrag: Oekraïense oligarchen moeten óók belasting betalen [925 Kamervragen]'. *925.nl*, 29 January 2016 (online).
- 18 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, Doc. 8, 4 May 2012, 'discussion points Benelux lunch'; and Doc. 26, 18 March 2013, 'analysis for trilateral meeting with Bulgaria and Lithuania'. Cited hereafter as MFA, plus document number, date and heading. The document numbers are the ministry's own in the batch sent to the Platform for Authentic Journalism under a Freedom of Information ('WOB') procedure.
- 19 Elena A. Korosteleva, 'Eastern partnership and the Eurasian Union: bringing "the political" back in the eastern region'. *European Politics and Society*, 17 (supl.) 2016, pp. 75–6.
- 20 MFA, Doc. 29, 12 June 2013, 'core message lunch Sikorski'.
- 21 MFA, Doc. 34, 19 August 2013, 'core message lunch Paet'.

- 22 W.C. Turck, *A Tragic Fate: Politics, Oil, the Crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 and the Looming Threats to Civil Aviation*. A Jinxee the Cat Publication, 2014. E-book, no pagination, chapter 3. MFA, Doc. 39, 12 September 2013, 'preparatory note for meeting prime minister Azarov'.
- 23 Hans van Zon, André Batak and Anna Kreslavskaya, *Social and Economic Change in Eastern Ukraine: The Example of Zaporizhzhya*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, pp. 61–3, 62, table 5.2; communication by Hans van Zon.
- 24 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, p. 55.
- 25 In the Dutch Foreign Ministry documents TTIP is repeatedly mentioned in the run-up to the Vilnius summit, but details are blacked out. MFA, Doc. 45, 23 September 2013, 'instruction EU meetings'.
- 26 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, pp. 23–4. One may well doubt this assessment in light of the Dutch Foreign Ministry documents.
- 27 MFA, Docs. 53, 54, 17 October; 4 November 2013, 'discussion points German minister for Europe' and 'notice for lunch with [European Commissioner for Enlargement etc., Stefan] Füle'.
- 28 MFA, Docs. 48, 52, 25 September and 9 October 2013, notices on Stockholm and Riga meetings, respectively. Here the conclusion I draw is based on the strategic deletions in the government documents.
- 29 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, p. 56.
- 30 Cited in De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 111.
- 31 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 78.
- 32 MFA, Doc. 43, 19 September 2013, 'discussion points Vilnius Summit'.
- 33 Cited in House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, p. 55.
- 34 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 57. From the Dutch Foreign Ministry documents one gets the impression that the EU wanted the rule of law as a general principle accepted, for investment protection first of all, and not necessarily to ensure the release of Tymoshenko.
- 35 Roderic Lyne, 'Russia's changed outlook on the west: from convergence to confrontation'. In Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge*, p. 9. A subsidiary of Rosatom also was active in Ukraine, working through associates of Firtash and Yuri Boyko of RusUkrEnergo, Peter Schweizer, *Clinton Cash: The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich*. New York: Harper, 2016 [2015], pp. 39–57; on Boyko, p. 51.
- 36 Cited in Diana Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*. Petrolia: CounterPunch Books, 2016, p. 133, emphasis added. See Wikipedia, 'South Stream' (online).
- 37 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*. New York: Basic Books, 2008, pp. 60–1.
- 38 Nuland's husband is the neocon ideologue, Robert Kagan, co-founder with William Kristol of the notorious Project for a New American Century, the cradle of the worldview that produced the War on Terror and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.
- 39 Zeyno Baran, *Security Aspects of the South Stream Project*. Brussels: European Parliament, October 2008 (online), pp. 29 and 32, respectively.
- 40 Adriel Kasonta and Richard Sakwa, 'Taking the war out of Warsaw'. *AntiWar.com*, 7 July 2016 (online). André Glucksman is a fellow 'new philosopher' alongside Bernard-Henry Lévy.
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- 42 Cited in Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 75.
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- 44 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 219.
- 45 Cited in Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 20.
- 46 Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA and the Surveillance State*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014.
- 47 Peter Dale Scott, *The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on U.S. Democracy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, p. 124; Greenwald, *No Place to Hide*, p. 101; Carlos Ortiz, *Private Armed Forces and Global Security*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010.

- 48 International Renaissance Foundation 2014–17 Strategy Proposal Ukraine. 2013 (online), pp. 2, 5, 7.
- 49 Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, pp. 33–4.
- 50 Cited in Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 74–5.
- 51 Hans van Zon, 'Oekraïne: einde van het conflict in zicht?' *Vlaams Marxistisch Tijdschrift*, 49 (4) 2015, p. 43.
- 52 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, p. 54; in Transparency International's corruption perception report for 2011, Ukraine was ranked 152nd (down from 134th), Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy*, p. 60.
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- 56 Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 152.
- 57 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp. 55–6; International Renaissance Foundation, p. 10.
- 58 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, pp. 56–7; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 90.
- 59 MFA, Doc. 40, 12 September 2013, 'dossier discussion with the Prime Minister'.
- 60 Van Zon, 'Oekraïne: einde van het conflict', p. 47.
- 61 Cited in Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 156.
- 62 Volodymyr Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures' [interview]. *New Left Review*, 2nd series, 87 (2014), p. 12; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 82.
- 63 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 49.
- 64 Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures', p. 13.
- 65 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 30.
- 66 Serhiy Kudelia, 'The Donbas rift' [trans. P. Golub]. *Russian Politics and Law*, 54 (1) 2016 [orig. in *Kontrapunkt*, no. 1 2015], p. 7; Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures', p. 13; Volodymyr Ishchenko, 'Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests: an attempt of systematic estimation'. *European Politics and Society*, 17 (4) 2016, p. 463.
- 67 MFA, Doc. 62, 13 January 2014, 'Question/answers situation Ukraine'.
- 68 Sergei Lavrov [interview with Russian foreign minister S. Lavrov]. *Mediterranean Dialogues*, 2 December 2016 (online).
- 69 Kudelia, 'The Donbas rift', p. 7.
- 70 Ishchenko, 'Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests', pp. 457–8; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 22, 57.
- 71 Ishchenko, 'Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests', p. 459, emphasis added.
- 72 Kudelia, 'The Donbas rift', pp. 7–8; Svoboda was involved in the largest number of incidents, Ishchenko, 'Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests', p. 460, fig. 3.
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- 74 MFA, Doc. 65, 27 January 2014, 'preparatory notes for talks with the Rumanian foreign minister'; and Doc. 64, 27 January 2014, 'discussion points and background Steinmeier visit'.
- 75 Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures', p. 15.
- 76 Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures', p. 18. In Chapter 1 I cited reports on street combat training in Estonia of Ukrainian UNA-UNSO militants. Manlio Dinucci, 'The art of war: the new Gladio in Ukraine'. *Voltaire Network*, 21 March 2014 (online).
- 77 'The flagrant use of force by protesters with the tacit support of opposition parties removed the major constraint that had previously kept the political struggle in Ukraine peaceful.' Kudelia, 'The Donbas rift', p. 9; see De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp. 29–30.
- 78 Different groups from Shekhovtsov, 'The Ukrainian far right', p. 224. This author plays down the fascist profile of Right Sector as Russian propaganda.
- 79 Gordon Hahn, 'The Ukrainian revolution's neo-fascist problem'. *Fair Observer*, 23 September 2014 (online), who cites its programme as anti-capitalist, racist and 'Führer'-centred.

- 80 *Ukraine Antifascist Solidarity*, 'Who is Andriy Parubiy? Protest UK visit of Ukrainian politician with far right links'. 13 October 2015 (online); see Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 83–4.
- 81 Dinucci, 'The art of war'.
- 82 Ivan Katchanovski, 'The separatist war in Donbas: a violent break-up of Ukraine?' *European Politics and Society*, 17 (4) 2016, p. 478; Ishchenko, 'Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests', p. 460.
- 83 Andrew Higgins and Andrew E. Kramer, 'Yanukovych was defeated even before his ouster'. *International New York Times*, 5 January 2015.
- 84 Thus a Chatham House report chronology entry for 20 February says 'at least 88 people reportedly die in 48 hours as protesters and police clash in [Kiev]'. Sherr, 'A war of narratives and arms', p. 25.
- 85 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 88.
- 86 Ishchenko, 'Ukraine's fractures', p. 20.
- 87 Ivan Katchanovski, 'The "Snipers' Massacre" on the Maidan in Ukraine'. Paper, American Political Science Association annual meeting, San Francisco, 3–6 September 2015 (online), summary; John Hall, 'Estonian Foreign Ministry confirms authenticity of leaked phone call'. *MailOnline*, 5 March 2014 (online). The same account in Hahn, 'The Ukrainian revolution's neo-fascist problem'.
- 88 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 31.
- 89 Katchanovski, 'The "Snipers' Massacre" on the Maidan', p. 53. On Kiev's reprisals over this report, De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp. 37–8.
- 90 Ivan Katchanovski, 'Media silent on striking revelations in the Kiev sniper massacre trial in Ukraine'. *Russia Insider*, 23 July 2015 (online). Hahn, 'The Ukrainian revolution's neo-fascist problem'.
- 91 MFA, Doc. 64, 27 January 2014. The country name is blacked out but it can only be Germany, whose foreign minister was visiting The Hague.
- 92 Barroso cited in Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 225; in 2016 he would be appointed chairman of the board of Goldman Sachs International. Other names in Joost Niemöller, *MH17: De Doofpotdeal* [preface K. Homan]. Amsterdam: Van Praag, 2014, p. 34 and De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp. 58–9.
- 93 Cited in Bruce Livesey, 'Blind eye turned to influence of far-right in Ukrainian crisis: critics'. *Global News*, 7 March 2014 (online).
- 94 House of Lords, *The EU and Russia*, pp. 63–4.
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- 101 Higgins and Kramer, 'Yanukovych was defeated even before his ouster'.
- 102 *Russia Today*, 'Putin in film on Crimea'; Higgins and Kramer, 'Yanukovych was defeated even before his ouster'; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 206.
- 103 Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos*, p. 154.
- 104 Dinucci, 'The art of war'.
- 105 Lavrov [interview with Russian foreign minister S. Lavrov], *Mediterranean Dialogues*.
- 106 Katchanovski, 'The separatist war in Donbas', p. 479.
- 107 Yatsenyuk's popularity rating in a survey taken three weeks before the seizure of power was under 3 per cent, against Klitschko's 28.7 per cent. De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 63.
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- 109 Kudelia, 'The Donbas rift', p. 9; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 94–5; Hahn, 'The Ukrainian revolution's neo-fascist problem'.
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The civil war and the MH17 disaster

The February 2014 regime change in Kiev placed state power in the hands of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and anti-Russian billionaires intent on removing the country from the post-Soviet orbit and reorienting it to the West. 'The profound civic impetus for dignity and good governance at the heart of the Maidan revolution', writes Richard Sakwa, 'was hijacked by the radicals who followed the monist path to its logical conclusion while allowing oligarch power to be reconstituted'.¹ The country's inevitable break-up was not long in coming. Like other successor states of the multi-national USSR, Moldova (Transnistria) and Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Ukraine began to fracture as a result of Western forward pressure.

In this chapter, I investigate how the coup regime, encouraged by its backers in Washington and Brussels, responded to the anti-Maidan movement among Russian-Ukrainians with extreme violence. I will argue that this can be traced to the determination of key players in the United States and NATO to raise the stakes in the trial of strength between an Atlantic West in the grip of an epochal crisis and hostage to the speculative capital responsible for it, and the BRICS contender bloc. As outlined in [Chapter 1](#), excessive risk-taking is a key feature of the speculative mindset; as the crisis reduces the opportunities for compromise, violent options move into the foreground.

This understanding frames my approach to the downing of MH17. Here the new Cold War, the struggles over Europe's energy supply, and the attempts by the Kiev war party to drag Russia into the conflict in the Donbass, all come together. The US and NATO strategy of derailing EU–Russia interdependence, weakening the BRICS bloc, and disrupting the 'Land for Gas' negotiations between Merkel and Putin, were well served by the catastrophe. The imposition of a new round of sanctions on Russia by the United States on 16 July acquires significance in this light; the sanctions were highly prejudicial to several EU countries and were only accepted after the Malaysian Airlines disaster occurred the next day.

Who actually shot down MH17 and how, I cannot confidently claim to know. If it was indeed a 'well-planned but poorly executed provocation', as the Russian air force general, Pyotr Deinekin, argues,² that might fit the US agenda of turning the screws on Moscow – something equally pressing for Kiev. But there were also military reasons to raise the stakes. Already twice that week, Andriy Parubiy and his friends in the NSDC had tried to pin the shooting down of Ukrainian (military) planes on Russia. Had the

Boeing crashed on its territory, Moscow could have been accused of wilfully bringing down a civilian plane as well, unleashing a public relations storm it would have had no response to, as with the Korean Airlines incident in September 1983.³ In the event, the NSDC explanation (a Buk fired from Russia) and Poroshenko's initial comment (a 'tragic incident', later changed to 'a terrorist act'), were dropped in favour of a narrative that a Buk, supplied by Russia, was fired by insurgents with Russian help and transported back again (the explanation of Avakov and Gerashchenko at the Interior Ministry).⁴

In this chapter I will first relate how the stirrings of an anti-Maidan movement in the Russian-Ukrainian provinces was responded to, on the urgent advice of US and NATO officials and American advisers in the field, with an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO, so-called because the use of military force within the country is only warranted under that label). We then turn to how the actual civil war in the east was decided and how it was covered by NATO. Turning next to the circumstances of the downing of Flight MH17, I confine myself to an assessment of the relevant weapon systems available to potential perpetrators, details on the flight's trajectory, and other background. This allows us to assign probabilities, not more. However, the responses to the downing, which briefly included the option of an actual Western military intervention, leave no doubt as to the aggressive intent, or if it was an accident, to the decision to exploit it to the maximum disadvantage of Russia.

The Donbass insurgency and the 'Anti-Terrorist Operation'

The Maidan insurrection and the *coup d'état* aroused spontaneous anger and anxiety among the Russian-Ukrainian population.⁵ People in the Donbass had reason to fear the new powers in Kiev and especially the paramilitary battalions. According to a local observer, 'an active separatist core coupled with the neutral attitude of the majority created favourable conditions for further mobilization of the separatist movement'.⁶

The Donbass is much more vital to the economic survival of Ukraine than Crimea; it accounts for 16 per cent of its GDP and 27 per cent of industrial production. This also gave the anti-Maidan movement its specific social complexion. As Sakwa highlights, it was lower class, anti-oligarch, part-Russian nationalist, but also multi-ethnic; very different from the middle class and Ukrainian nationalist signature of the Maidan movement.⁷ Yet, the People's Republic label adopted in rebel Donetsk and Lugansk was not a return to state socialism. The new entities took a socially conservative line and when the issue of nationalising Akhmetov's assets was raised, the Donetsk leadership rejected it. The oligarch nevertheless turned against the insurgency in May and organised his workers to fight it, albeit with little success.⁸

Meanwhile regime change in Kiev had seriously weakened the Ukrainian state. The dismissal of tens of thousands of officials associated with the former regime, with few if any competent replacements, left it without the means to execute *any* specific policy effectively. Late in May the Kiev regime would publish a 'list of shame' with the names of 17,000 policemen who had joined the uprising.⁹ Just as the absence of a programme had surrendered the broader Maidan movement to the armed radicals, the weakening of the state gave them and their oligarch backers disproportional power once they were at the helm – albeit under NATO auspices.

Try as it might, this state was incapable of controlling the eastern provinces. At Yuliya Tymoshenko's insistence, Ihor Kolomoisky was appointed to the governorship of Dnepropetrovsk oblast, home to some of Ukraine's most prized industrial assets, including Akhmetov's Metinvest and Pinchuk's Interpipe (which may explain why Yatsenyuk was not keen on this appointment).¹⁰ Kolomoisky was charged with suppressing the separatists, both by financing (para-)military units and operations against Russian-Ukrainians, and by using his influence in Odessa and Kharkov.¹¹ Hennadiy Kernes, mayor of Kharkov and originally a member of the Yanukovych clan, survived politically by becoming a Kolomoisky associate after the oligarch obtained assurances that Kernes would keep his city, the second-largest of the country and a key centre of heavy industry, from joining the insurgency. However, as *Observer Ukraine* would later report, Kernes did not break his ties with the former Kharkov governor and committed federalist, Mykhailo Dobkin.¹²

Oligarch Serhiy Taruta, a financial backer of Yatsenyuk (along with Pinchuk) was appointed governor of Donetsk. Kiev Interior Minister Avakov personally went to the city of Donetsk to incite football hooligans against pro-Russians as a way to feed nationalist fervour, but it had to be ceded to the insurgency. Taruta lost control and repaired to Mariupol as temporary capital.¹³

Launching the civil war with US support

E-mails of NATO commander General Philip Breedlove reveal that the war party in the United States and NATO began to elaborate a strategy that would make Ukraine the testing ground for a trial of strength with Russia and China from late March onwards.¹⁴ The secession of Crimea and its re-incorporation into the Russian Federation was exploited to evoke the spectre of an expansionist Russia threatening invasion on several fronts. After all, the Russian Federation Council had authorised Putin to deploy troops abroad in response to threats, basically a measure to protect Crimea from the new regime in Kiev (an authorisation revoked on 24 June to facilitate a ceasefire). Breedlove, commander of US Eucom (European Command, one of nine regional US military commands spanning the globe) and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (Saceur), envisaged two fronts, the Baltic states and Ukraine. When Natalie Crawford at the RAND Corporation suggested that the United States should do 'something major and it needs to be public to all including the Baltic states', Breedlove replied, 'I am assembling a "joint" package of air, land, and sea to put long term assurance in the Balts'.¹⁵ As to Ukraine, he wrote on 29 March that he expected the border to get 'ugly very soon'.

From the correspondence of 5 and 6 April between Phillip Karber and General Wesley Clark, a former NATO Saceur, it emerges that they were already advising Kiev forces in eastern Ukraine before the Donbass had actually risen in revolt. Karber is the ex-CEO of the aerospace consultancy, BDM (originally a Ford subsidiary and sold to Northrop Grumman by the equity fund, Carlyle)¹⁶ and president of the Washington think tank founded by it, the Potomac Foundation. One major line of his activity was to assist former Soviet bloc countries in their quest for NATO membership and the coup regime in Kiev sought his advice too.¹⁷ A US Marines veteran himself, Karber reported positively on army units deployed on the 'northeastern front' (no fighting had erupted

yet); 'the problem' was in Kiev and Washington.¹⁸ Earlier US and EU calls on Kiev to exercise restraint over Crimea now worked against a forceful response in the Donbass, Karber wrote to Clark. The State Department was ready to support action, but the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were slowing things down.¹⁹

On 6 April, government buildings in Donetsk and other cities were occupied. Weapons arsenals were looted too, in a late echo of what had happened in the Ukrainian far west. One Anatoliy Pinchuk of the nationalist Information Resistance reported the seizures to Karber, thanking him and Wesley Clark for their help so far; he also implored them to intervene with Kiev to confiscate the assets of Akhmetov, suspected of complicity with the separatists. For Pinchuk, the occupations were '*the beginning of the second phase of the scenario for the Russian invasion in our country*' (the first having been Crimea).²⁰ Clark forwarded this information to Nuland and Pyatt an hour later. Thus, the narrative of the 'Russian invasion' reached the highest echelons of the Western war party early on and it remains the framework in which events in Ukraine are interpreted.

In fact, the Donbass had effectively broken away from Kiev well before 12 April when a local volunteer militia led by the Russian nationalist and former FSB officer, Igor Strelkov, stormed the police station and SBU headquarters in Slavyansk. This turned the movement into an armed insurrection. The attack raised the spectre of a 'Crimean scenario' because Russian connivance could not be ruled out.²¹ Kiev promptly dispatched Parubiy and Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Yarema to promise a return to federalism, but to no avail. Avakov had more success with Kernes in Kharkov, and Kolomoiskiy's men held the line in Dnepropetrovsk.²² Odessa's turn would come on 2 May.

Wesley Clark now wrote to Nuland that the United States should make a statement supporting a military operation to regain control of the east, urging her to ignore possible German objections. Still on the 12th, he asked Breedlove whether the NATO commander could not arrange a statement blaming Moscow for the violence because '*if the Ukrainians lose control of the narrative, the Russians will see it as an open door*'.²³ Clark then elaborated on the general geopolitical situation, giving further insights into why the war party in the United States believed that Ukraine was to be 'held' and chose it as a battle ground to confront Russia and China. No time was wasted on market democracy or the 'Revolution of Dignity' here. Claiming that 'Putin has read US inaction in Georgia and Syria as US "weakness"', Clark went on to explain that

China is watching closely. China will have four aircraft carriers and airspace dominance in the Western Pacific within 5 years, if current trends continue. And if we let Ukraine slide away, it definitely raises the risks of conflict in the Pacific. For, China will ask, would the US then assert itself for Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, the South China Sea? ... If Russia takes Ukraine, Belarus will join the Eurasian Union, and, presto, the Soviet Union (in another name) will be back ... Neither the Baltics nor the Balkans will easily resist the political disruptions empowered by a resurgent Russia. And what good is a NATO 'security guarantee' against internal subversion? ... And then the US will face a much stronger Russia, a crumbling NATO, and [a] major challenge in the Western Pacific. *Far easier to [hold] the line now, in Ukraine than elsewhere, later.*²⁴

The references to 'political disruptions' and 'internal subversion' can be decoded as discontent by Russians and Russian-speakers in the Baltic states (in Estonia and Latvia

they constitute around a quarter of the population). After the coup in Kiev and its moves against the Russian language, sensitivity about comparable measures in the Baltic states had inevitably grown; in Latvia, a new law prescribed the use of Latvian in Russophone secondary schools, amidst a growing mood in favour of ethnic cleansing. With the Kaliningrad exclave wedged in between Poland and the Baltic states, the trope of a 'Russian invasion' served to legitimise a strategy of bolstering Baltic nationalists against forces like the Harmony Party of Riga Mayor Nils Uštakovs, the voice of the dispossessed in Latvia, one of the ten most unequal countries in the OECD.²⁵

On the weekend of 13 and 14 April, CIA Director John Brennan was in the Ukrainian capital. He was followed by dozens of CIA advisers and Academi (formerly, Blackwater) mercenaries.²⁶ The Anti-Terrorist Operation began right after Brennan's visit; Parubiy sent out a Twitter message on 15 April that veterans of the Maidan uprising were poised to join the fight.²⁷ Since NATO had earlier implored Yanukovich not to use force against (armed) demonstrators, Moscow now asked the alliance to restrain the coup leaders in turn. But according to Foreign Minister Lavrov, the answer they got was that 'NATO would ask them to use force proportionately'.²⁸

Ukrainian army personnel, meanwhile, were reticent to use violence against their compatriots. The crack 25th airborne division dispatched to insurgent Kramatorsk was welcomed with flowers and Russian flags and not a shot was fired. Neither did Ukrainians, even in western regions, clamour to enlist after compulsory conscription was reintroduced in May (it had been abolished in 2013). Hence, the regular army confined itself to artillery shelling, Grad rocket fire and air bombardment using Su-25 ground support jets, causing many civilian casualties. Direct combat was left to the Ukrainian nationalist paramilitary battalions. These militias were recruited from the Maidan armed units, army volunteers and foreign mercenaries, including Georgians, Romanians and white supremacists from Sweden and Germany; as well as veteran commandos from the Israeli Blue Helmets, who had been active at the Maidan. Islamist battalions from Chechnya, too, fought on the side of Kiev.²⁹

Kolomoisky was the main financier of these units and reputedly spent \$10 million to create his own 2,000-strong Dnipro 1 battalion, named after the Dnepropetrovsk football club, and a 20,000-member reserve force. He also supported the Azov, Aidar and Donbass battalions, whilst supplying free fuel for the Ukrainian air force.³⁰ In all, three dozen battalions were created, with many thousands under arms, often malcontents capable of extreme brutality. Kolomoisky's bounties for 'Russian spies' only made things worse. The Tornado police battalion, created by Avakov for eastern Ukraine, acquired a fearsome reputation for torture. Avakov himself stated in June that one 'benefit of war is that it can have a "cleansing" effect on the nation'.³¹ Some Tornado officers would be prosecuted, but as late as May 2016 a team of inspectors of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture had to call off its tour of SBU-controlled sites in Ukraine suspected of inhuman treatment of prisoners, after being denied access.³²

Along with Right Sector, the Maidan umbrella formation led by Dmytro Yarosh, the militias would consistently block any conciliatory moves towards the Russian-Ukrainian population, leading the country into a quagmire with no end in sight.

As to the insurgency, NATO Commander Breedlove claimed it was part of a 'well planned and organized' military operation directed by the Russian government;³³

according to a report from the influential Chatham House, the Donbass fighters were 'a motley assortment of serving officers in the FSB and GRU (Russian military intelligence), remnants of Ukraine's former Berkut "special" police, the private security forces of oligarchs, Cossacks, Chechen fighters, adventurers and criminals'.³⁴ In fact, what faced the Kiev ATO units was an insurrection that rested first of all on the inhabitants, often miners and other workers made redundant by the collapsing economy. 'Donbass natives made up the majority of the militias from the start', writes Serhiy Kudelia. 'This is confirmed by the list of volunteer casualties (dominated by Ukrainians), and the database of separatists created with the support of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, which shows that two-thirds of the separatists are locals.'³⁵

With civil war looming, Russia, the EU and the United States convened in Geneva on 17 April, in the presence of representatives of the Ukrainian coup government, but without Donbass representatives (blocked by Kiev from attending). On 20 April, agreement was reached about amnesty, elections and constitutional change that were substantially the same as the concessions Yanukovich had made in February.³⁶ However, the next day, 21 April, Right Sector militants, commanded by Yarosh, attacked unarmed civilians in Slavyansk, killing five. 'This attack by the paramilitary alliance of radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations constituted a major escalation of the conflict', writes Ivan Katchanovski.³⁷ Henceforth, whenever a negotiated solution appeared possible, these forces, backed by NATO, would strike to block it.

The Obama administration granted \$2 billion in credit guarantees to the Kiev regime and almost \$760 million worth of security aid, beginning right after February's takeover. Canada, with its powerful Ukrainian diaspora, dispatched \$5 million worth in defence equipment, whilst the neoconservative Harper government assigned \$49 million for anti-Russian propaganda. US Vice-President Biden travelled to Kiev twice and would later complain that he spoke more often to the new rulers than to his wife.³⁸ The United States and NATO were also directly involved with the paramilitary militias. Relations with Kolomoisky's Dnipro battalion were so close that its commander, Col. Yuri Bereza, visited Phillip Karber in Washington several times in late 2014; Karber spent Christmas with Dnipro I HQ near the front line.³⁹ The Azov battalion, a stronghold of the Social-National Assembly, characterised by Gordon Hahn as 'ultra-fascist', also was supported by US advisers and volunteers. Congress in December 2015 even scrapped a provision limiting assistance to it.⁴⁰

The Odessa and Mariupol massacres

To prevent the southern Russian-Ukrainian belt from joining the insurgency, Kiev responded to signs of discontent in Odessa, the third-largest city of Ukraine, with disproportionate violence. Unlike Crimea, secure in the Russian fold, or the Donbass with Russia right behind it, the cosmopolitan Black Sea port of Odessa was on its own.

The operation in Odessa was discussed at a high-level meeting in Kiev on 24 April, three days after the Slavyansk attacks, with no other large-scale fighting yet in evidence. This meeting, reconstructed by the magazine *Oriental Review* from interviews with anonymous law enforcement officers, was chaired by coup president Turchynov. Avakov, SBU head Valentin Nalivaychenko and Parubiy were present as well. Avakov

had experience with mobilising football hooligans from his time as head of the Kharkov regional administration and proposed using them in Odessa again, since Metallist Kharkiv were playing there on 2 May. Kolomoisky's Dnipro 1 battalion, under temporary command of Odessa law enforcement, was made available for the operation, whilst the oligarch reportedly offered a \$5,000 bounty for each 'pro-Russian separatist' killed.⁴¹ Parubiy then travelled to Odessa to confer with local security officers in an operational meeting on 29 April, as recorded in the original version of the report of the investigative commission presented by Kiev MP Svetlana Fabricant (but deleted from the published version). According to the NSDC secretary's own testimony, 'the meeting of the Operational Centre lasted over two hours; we discussed all the current issues and we adopted appropriate decisions to *prevent destabilization of the situation in [the] Odessa region*'.⁴²

From the available sources, it would seem that on the fatal day, some Right Sector fighters, disguised as civilians and pretending to be 'separatists', fired at football fans returning from the match. Hooligans of the two clubs and armed ultras then assembled for a pro-Kiev march. An anti-Maidan tent camp in front of the Trade Union Building was set on fire, its occupants driven inside and the building torched, killing at least 48, possibly more. The Right Sector website celebrated the massacre as a 'bright page in our national history'.⁴³ On 8 May, Turchynov appointed the oligarch Ihor Palytsia, a close associate of Kolomoisky, governor of the Odessa region, to replace the incompetent millionaire, Nemirovskiy. Palytsia was to keep the city under control after the massacre and head off an anti-Maidan insurgency there.⁴⁴

In Mariupol, the second-largest city in Donetsk oblast and its temporary capital, police refused to disperse an anti-Maidan demonstration on 9 May, the day of remembrance of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. In response, the newly appointed head of police in the city, V. Androshuk, accompanied by a commander of Kolomoisky's Dnipro 1 battalion, then got into a fire-fight with the police, in which the Dnipro commander was killed and Androshuk wounded. When National Guard troops and Right Sector militants arrived with tanks and armoured cars, the police station in which the rebellious officers had withdrawn was set on fire, with again dozens killed.⁴⁵

By now, the country was sliding into civil war: Besides large-scale financial support from the West, 400 Academi/Blackwater mercenaries were part of the thrust to regain control of Slavyansk in early May, whilst CIA and FBI advisers were reported to be assisting the coup government.⁴⁶

From civil war to NATO-Russia standoff

The presidential election of 25 May, necessary to confer legitimacy on the coup government, was duly applauded as free and fair by Western observers. In fact, Firtash, still in Vienna (where he was on bail pending an extradition request by the United States), had already assigned Poroshenko his role as president in March. Apparently, the federalist oligarch still enjoyed enough power to ensure the anointment of what the US embassy called (speaking of Poroshenko) a 'disgraced oligarch tainted by credible accusations of corruption'.⁴⁷ The Vienna deal also included immunity from prosecution for the oligarchs who had supported Yanukovych and a peaceful solution to the conflict in the east. Finally,

as a reward for not standing against Poroshenko, the position of mayor of Kiev was offered to Klitschko.⁴⁸

On 21 May, on the eve of the election, Parubiy was at NATO's Brussels headquarters for talks and Vice President Biden's Washington office announced that the US and NATO allies would hold naval exercises in the Black Sea in July, codenamed 'Breeze', along with army exercises codenamed 'Rapid Trident II'.⁴⁹ If the EU found this disturbing, it did not demur; European elections, revealing a stark rise in right-wing populist, anti-Brussels sentiment, further reduced its authority in world affairs.⁵⁰ Economically too, US-dominated financial institutions were backing the Kiev regime. The IMF disbursed the first \$3.2 billion of a new loan in the month of the election, with stringent austerity conditions, but none concerning the civil war, which should have ruled out any IMF involvement to begin with. At a later stage, it would also shore up the country's banking sector: Kolomoisky's Privatbank received 40 per cent, \$1.8 billion, of the almost \$5 billion IMF support, which the oligarch embezzled through pseudo-contracts to offshore accounts, with donors looking the other way. Banks' capital ratios, which in June 2014 stood at 15.9 per cent, in the early months of 2015 dwindled to 13.8 per cent as a result of massive stealing.⁵¹

With Klitschko dispatched to Kiev, Poroshenko won the election in the first round with 54 per cent, mostly in the west of Ukraine – on a turnout of 60 per cent. Tymoshenko, who had spoiled her chances by threats of a nuclear war with Russia, got 12.8 per cent. Of the remaining ultras, only Lyashko of the Radical Party and the 'Ukraine' battalion passed the 5 per cent threshold with 8.3 per cent.⁵² The fascists, Tyagnybok (Svoboda) and Yarosh of Right Sector, scored around 1 per cent each. The surviving federalists, cut off from their base, withdrew or did badly. Tsarev, who on the eve of the coup revealed that the US embassy was training regime-change activists, received death threats from Kolomoisky personally and fled the country.⁵³

The July offensive and NATO monitoring

On the margins of D-Day celebrations in Normandy in June, Poroshenko agreed with Putin to start talks on a ceasefire, for which a Russian emissary arrived in Kiev on 8 June. On 24 June the Russian Federation Council revoked the authority granted to Putin in March to deploy Russian troops in Ukraine. Moscow had already indicated it did not want the Donbass insurgency to lead to secession when it refused to honour a referendum on the issue. It did recognise the results of the Ukrainian presidential election, leading to angry accusations by Strelkov and other commanders of the insurgency.⁵⁴ Russia, however, was responding to an apparent EU willingness to give it breathing space. After Kiev signed the economic Association Agreement with the EU on 27 June, implementation of the DCFTA was postponed to 31 December 2015.⁵⁵

However, when Poroshenko indicated he intended to prolong the ceasefire in the last days of June in spite of his post-election promise to 'liquidate [the insurgents] in days', a threatening demonstration in Kiev by the Donbass and Aidar battalions and Kolomoisky's Dnipro 1 demanded the immediate resumption of the civil war. Interior Minister Avakov's Kiev-based paramilitary group 17+ Sotny was also involved in the demonstrations.⁵⁶ Their belligerence was echoed by the war party in the United States and NATO. The American ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, lavished

praise on the Kiev regime and warned Europe against caving in to 'Russian aggression'; the EU fell in line on the 27th when it 'called on Putin to take steps to de-escalate the violence in Ukraine'. The Polish president, Bronislaw Komorowski, even proposed suspending Russia's UN veto power.⁵⁷ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the West did not want the forces of compromise to prevail and gambled instead on a new offensive.

On 30 June, following a four-hour NSDC meeting with Parubiy, Avakov and others whose followers were demonstrating outside, Poroshenko declared that the ceasefire would be lifted and a new offensive launched. Valeriy Heletey, the new secretary of defence (his predecessor, Koval, was made deputy secretary of the NSDC) promised an imminent victory parade in Sebastopol.⁵⁸ Alarmed by the prospect of a full-scale civil war, the German and French foreign ministers, Steinmeier and Fabius, convened a last-minute meeting with their Russian and Kiev colleagues, Lavrov and P. Klimkin, in Berlin on 2 July, one day into the renewed hostilities. They reached a deal on a ceasefire, further negotiations, and OSCE control of the Ukrainian border – a provision especially threatening to the insurgency because it would cut off their supply lines. However, the United States was again not represented and indignantly condemned the agreement as a 'craven surrender to Russian aggression'.⁵⁹ The State Department claimed that 'Russia continues to provide [the insurgents] with heavy weapons, other military equipment and financing and continues to allow militants to enter Ukraine freely'.⁶⁰

On 4 July, the 'Breeze 2014' NATO naval manoeuvres in the Black Sea, announced in May, commenced under the official auspices of Bulgaria. Besides the US, naval units from Britain, Romania and Turkey, Greece and Italy took part. Electronic warfare was a key component of the manoeuvres. Significantly, the French and Germans did not participate, although there were two French ships in the area, the frigate *Surcouf* and the signals intelligence ship, *Dupuy de Lôme*.⁶¹ In response to the NATO show of force, 20 ships of Russia's Black Sea fleet also began manoeuvres, including missile launches at practice targets.⁶² The alarm about an impending Russian invasion was sounded throughout, echoed by NATO command. Obviously the aim was to call for a major Western response should an event come about that signalled Russian and/or insurgent escalation, or might be construed as such.⁶³

The new offensive went well for Kiev. Slavyansk, the gas hub where the revolt had started, was taken by its forces on 5 July. On 7 July, Artemivsk and Druzhkivka fell. On 10 July, Siversk, a village just east of Slavyansk and 100 kilometres northeast of Donetsk, was taken, suggesting a possible encirclement of the city. The next day, Poroshenko warned that the insurgents in Donetsk were in for 'a nasty surprise'.⁶⁴ Was this bluff or a provocation? With the NATO summit in Wales coming up in September, the trope of a 'Russian invasion' had become vital to the survival of the alliance after the Afghanistan debacle. Hence, the war party's strategy, according to Mike Whitney, was to 'lure Putin across the border and into the conflict, or the neocon plan [would fall] apart, which it will if they can't demonise Putin as a "dangerous aggressor" who can't be trusted as a business partner'.⁶⁵

Above I already referred to the privatisation of US intelligence. Satellite surveillance is largely privatised to the DigitalGlobe corporation which had become the monopoly supplier after acquiring its one competitor, GeoEye, in 2013. It serves a range of customers including the Pentagon's National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA).

Its high resolution surveillance over eastern Ukraine suggested a push through the Debaltsevo corridor in order to cut off Donetsk from Lugansk, and a southward flanking operation to allow an attack on the city of Donetsk from the rear. The maps of the areas covered were later made public by a Russian geography website, Neogeography.ru, as part of an analysis of the downing of Flight MH17.⁶⁶ On 11 July, DigitalGlobe monitored sectors west of Donetsk and north of Druzhkivka, above the Druzhkivka-Artemivsk line captured by Kiev three days earlier. On 12 July, a wider area was surveyed, partly extending into Lugansk oblast. Apparently, a sector offering strategic depth and secure flanks was being mapped for a push towards Debaltsevo, which had already been the target of heavy fighting in May. Yet Moscow seemed unwilling to commit to the struggle directly, in spite of serious reverses for the insurgency. To cite Mike Whitney again (writing on 9 July): the United States 'has a very small window to draw Putin into the fray, which is why we should expect another false flag incident ... *Washington is going to have to do something really big and make it look like it was Moscow's doing*'.⁶⁷

This was published eight days before the MH17 disaster. Yet Breeze 2014, the ten-day NATO naval exercise begun on the 4th, ended without major incident. On the 14th, the US Navy's AEGIS-class guided missile cruiser USS *Vella Gulf*, a type of ship equipped with AN/SPY 1 radar that can track long-distance targets, left the Black Sea in compliance with the Montreux Convention, which limits to 21 days the naval presence of countries not bordering it.⁶⁸ After the departure of *Vella Gulf*, other NATO ships remained in the Black Sea and were there on the day of the downing of MH17; notably, the Italian flagship frigate ITS *Aviere* and a number of electronic surveillance ships and minesweepers of other NATO states (but apparently none belonging to the US Navy).⁶⁹

The Breeze 2014 exercise in addition included 'the use of electronic warfare and electronic intelligence aircraft such as the Boeing EA-18G Growler and the Boeing E3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)' and these elements were also part of exercises throughout the previous month.⁷⁰ On 5 June, a dangerous loss of transponder signals (by which a civilian plane returns a radar signal to identify itself) from more than 50 passenger planes over south Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland, turned out to have been caused by an undeclared NATO exercise in Hungary, *Newfip*. When the same phenomenon occurred again later that month, causing delays and flight cancellations, the German government had to inquire with NATO Air Command in Ramstein whether electronic warfare exercises from 9 to 20 June in Italy had been responsible.⁷¹

After a few days with little or no coverage, DigitalGlobe resumed satellite observation on 15 July. The sectors surveyed cover the eastern approaches to Donetsk, once again suggesting an intended encirclement of the city. An ATO advance force occupying the area east of the line Krasny Lutch–Snizhne (Ukr: Snezhnoye) in the eastern tip of Donetsk oblast, where it points into Russia, had almost succeeded in closing the ring, but found itself cut off when the insurgents recaptured Marinovka. Snizhne was heavily shelled on the 15th; Kiev forces also pushed to re-establish contact with the enclosed troops by capturing Chrinkino, east of Debaltsevo, from the north.⁷² On the 16th, DigitalGlobe mapped a corridor of approximately 100 kilometres in length, covering the area well into Lugansk oblast and including Russian territory (Figure 4.1).



4.1 Sectors surveyed by DigitalGlobe Satellite on 16 July 2014.

Neogeography.ru concludes from this image that since the survey area comprises the flight path of MH17, DigitalGlobe was to provide an accurate, up-to-date image to allow automated remote sensing from space later. The next day, there was a state-of-the-art US satellite passing over the crash site at the exact hour of the downing, so this is not a possibility to be dismissed lightly. In addition, an offensive from Amvrosievka to the south was launched to relieve the trapped ATO troops, past Saur Mohyla on the Russian border (roughly to the right of the star in the figure indicating where the plane came down). First, let us review which relevant air assets were in place.

Air and anti-aircraft assets and operations

In this section I sum up which weapons might have been used to down Flight MH17 and, given their availability, the probability of either side actually using them. Practically all air and anti-aircraft assets belonged to Ukraine, as the insurgents had no air force and

only light anti-aircraft weapons; so suspicion rests squarely on the regime in Kiev – bar a special operation by insurgents with Russian military assistance.

First, fighter planes. When the USSR collapsed, Ukraine had the fourth largest air force in the world after the United States, Russia and China. However, in March 2014, the coup regime's initial defence minister, Admiral Ihor Tenyukh, reported that of Ukraine's 507 combat planes (plus 121 attack helicopters), only 15 per cent were serviceable, and a mere one in ten 'capable of performing combat tasks'.⁷³ In a report to NATO Commander Breedlove half a year later, Phillip Karber counted some 120 planes again. Of the most important fighter jet, the supersonic Mikoyan MiG-29 (NATO code name, *Fulcrum*), the air force originally had 200, of which in 2014, 85 were operational after one squadron was lost with the Crimean secession. They were grouped into two Tactical Aviation Brigades of 32 planes each (40th TAB near Kiev and 114th in Ivano-Frankivsk oblast in the west). Around 21 further planes were kept for special duties. The MiG-29 is armed with cannon and R-27 air-to-air missiles. Two were shot down in the civil war by October 2014. Of the other supersonic fighters, Sukhoi Su-27 and 24, Kiev had 18 and 8 in active service, respectively. According to Karber, the Su-27 was not used and the Su-24 was not much used either, because of defective armament and other problems; one was lost in the civil war.⁷⁴

The one other fighter plane intensively used was the Sukhoi Su-25 (NATO code name, *Frogfoot*). Originally, the Ukrainian air force had 44, but in the autumn of 2014 only 8 remained in 299th Tactical Aviation Brigade, stationed at Kubalkino airbase in Mykolaiv oblast in the south, after 5 to 6 had been shot down and 2 to 3 damaged in the period up to October 2014. The Su-25 is a ground-support, subsonic fighter armed with R-60 infrared-guided missiles and cannon with armour-piercing ammunition. The dozen or so in service were the planes of choice for the sort of war Kiev was waging in the east. In their press conference on 21 July, the Russian military asked why an Ukrainian fighter jet had been observed climbing up towards the Malaysian Airlines Boeing, referring to it as 'presumably an Su-25'. Thus this type of plane came to figure prominently in the alternative to the Buk theory of the downing of MH17.

In the erupting propaganda war after 17 July, the fact that an Su-25 can operate up to 10 kilometres was thrown into doubt by the plane's Ukrainian designer and on several Western websites, a 3 kilometres lower ceiling was duly posted.⁷⁵ Senior Russian air force officers, on the other hand, testified they had flown it up to 12 kilometres. All this distracted from the much more probable theory that if MH17 had been downed by a jet attack, one or more supersonic MiG-29s would most likely have been involved (the reflective surfaces of an Su-25 and the MiG-29, on which radar images rely, happen to be identical). An Su-25 might have fired its missiles, but otherwise this type of plane is not fast enough to get alongside a Boeing at cruising speed and manoeuvre around it; a cannon salvo hitting such a fast-moving target would be spread out along the length of the fuselage.⁷⁶

This takes us to anti-aircraft capabilities, notably the SA-11 medium-range surface-to-air missiles (Buk) identified by Kiev, NATO and Western media as the fatal weapon. When the USSR broke up, many of the original Buk M1 missiles that had served in the Soviet border zone air defences remained behind in Ukraine. A Buk battery consists of two transporter erector launcher and radar (TELAR) vehicles and one transporter

erector launcher (TEL) vehicle; three batteries form a battalion with a command vehicle and a more sophisticated radar vehicle added. The TELAR, with inbuilt radar, was developed to allow it to continue to fire in case the separate radar vehicle was incapacitated. A complete Buk system can spot and fire at a target in a radius of 140 kilometres; a single TELAR has a reduced radius of 42 kilometres.⁷⁷ After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia moved on to equip itself with different versions, M1–2 and M2, but Ukraine, too, attempted to upgrade its Buk units with the help of local industry. Information about these modernised Buk M1s appeared on the Kiev defence ministry's website in late June, when they became operational.⁷⁸ Kiev has 27 Buk M1 batteries, in nine battalions grouped in four anti-aircraft regiments: 11, 223, 108, and 156th. The operational Buks of 156 anti-aircraft (AA) regiment, based in the Donbass, had been removed already in March by the commander, Col. Ivan Terebukha.⁷⁹

On 12 July 2014, all of Ukraine's air defences were put on high alert. ATO spokesman Vladyslav Seleznyov on that day announced on Facebook that the 'regular air defence of Ukraine was put on readiness alert No 1', an announcement confirmed by Ukrinform with reference to the threat coming from Grad rocket launchers of the insurgency and from Russia.⁸⁰ The order was still in force on the 17th, as confirmed also by the German government on 9 September. In a statement of 19 July, the Russian Defence Ministry noted that 156 AA regiment had been deployed around Donetsk with their Kupol-M1 9S18 radars activated.⁸¹ In their press conference of the 21st, the Russian military would present a day-to-day list of which Ukrainian Buk radars had been active in the week leading up to the disaster:

From the start of the July offensive, claims were made that the rebels had Buks, too. In a press conference on 30 June, NATO Commander Breedlove asserted that the insurgents were being trained in Russia in the use of 'vehicle-borne anti-aircraft systems', but that the Americans 'had not yet observed that these systems were being transported across the border to Ukraine'.⁸² This was cited in a report by the Dutch joint intelligence services (the military MIVD and the domestic AIVD), published in April 2015. The report summarises NATO and allied intelligence in an obvious attempt to exculpate the two Dutch services for having failed to warn of the danger to civilian airliners. The AA systems Breedlove refers to, it notes, by all accounts *were still not in Ukraine on the 17th*. Certainly the insurgents on 29 June captured an Ukrainian military base in Donetsk, where Buk M1 missile systems were stationed, but these were not in working order:

[The capture of the base] was reported extensively in the media prior to the crash. The MIVD also received intelligence information on the subject, on 30 June and 3 July 2014 as well as on other dates. During the course of July, several reliable sources indicated that *the systems that were at the military base were not operational. Therefore, they could not be used by the Separatists*.⁸³

The issue became a matter of debate since anti-aircraft fire, according to different estimates, had already cost Kiev numerous helicopters and planes. In the weeks leading up to 17 July, it lost two more Su-25s, five Mi-24 Hind and two Mi-8 Hip helicopters, as well as two heavy Antonov military transport planes and an Ilyushin Il-76. Even so, a number of international airlines continued to fly over eastern Ukraine. One reason why

Ukrainian air traffic control persisted in directing civilian planes there even after the Il-76 was shot down over Lugansk on 8 July, may have been that Ukrainian fighter pilots had found a new way of covering themselves by flying in the path of civilian planes to disguise themselves from ground radar. If so, Kiev would have been sending airliners through the northern corridor for that reason (and for the fees).⁸⁴

The Dutch intelligence *Review Report* maintained that the insurgents possessed only light anti-aircraft artillery, short-range portable defence systems (MANPADS) and 'possibly ... short-range vehicle-borne air-defence systems'. As late as 16 July the AIVD obtained intelligence showing that the insurgents did not possess medium-range anti-aircraft missiles.⁸⁵ So how were heavy transport planes brought down? This became a real and, in light of what followed, significant controversy when the insurgents shot down an Antonov An-26 transport plane near the city of Lugansk on 14 July. The Kiev authorities claimed that the Antonov had been flying at an altitude well above the reach of known insurgent anti-aircraft weapons and blamed the Russians for having fired a Buk. According to a *Bloomberg* report of the 16th, 'Ukraine's government also has "indisputable proof" that Russia was involved in the shooting down of [the An-26] ... citing the head of Ukraine's intelligence service, Valentyn Nalivaychenko'.⁸⁶

This was an undisguised attempt, three days before the downing of MH17, to implicate Moscow as an active belligerent and turn the civil war into an international crisis. Kiev claimed that Russia was implicated because its own intelligence was that the insurgents did not have systems that could reach a target at 6,200 metres. However, there were competing claims that the An-26 had not been brought down by a powerful system; had it been, it would have exploded in the air. The plane must have flown at a much lower level and having been hit in one engine, probably by a portable MANPAD or short-range, vehicle-borne system, it crash-landed, after which prisoners were taken.⁸⁷

In response to this incident, Kiev issued a NOTAM (notice to airmen) restricting the airspace for civilian airliners east of Dnepropetrovsk. Western diplomats (including the German ambassador and a Dutch embassy councillor) were informed of a 'new threat level' – something normally communicated to military attachés. Was this to convey at the highest diplomatic level that Bucs were being fired at Kiev planes, possibly to be covered in another such incident and set the stage for an international response? The NOTAM ceiling of 10,000 metres made no sense if a Buk, which can reach targets up to 22 kilometres, had indeed been used. What we do know is that 10,000 metres is the maximum height at which Su-25 jets, reportedly covering themselves below civilian airliners against radar detection, can fly. Why, then, did Western diplomats not raise questions? The Dutch government would only hand over the memo of the NOTAM briefing to the Dutch Safety Board (entrusted with the technical investigation of the crash) six months later, in January 2015, after media and the Christian Democrat MP, Pieter Omtzigt, had publicised the matter.⁸⁸ Finally, on the 17th (in fact, a few hours before the downing of MH17) Kiev revised its verdict, now claiming that the An-26 had been shot down by the insurgents after all.⁸⁹

In the meantime, on the 16th, Kiev lost a further Su-25 ground-support jet. It claimed it had been shot down in a dogfight with a Russian MiG-29, which had supposedly entered Ukrainian airspace and also damaged another Su-25. As the *New York Times* reported, 'a Ukrainian security official was complaining about the Russian incursion at

a briefing on Thursday around the same time Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was taking off from Amsterdam'.⁹⁰ This was the second attempt to trigger a Western response against Moscow (which denied the event, even apart from the fact that no Su-25 pilot would risk a fight with the far superior MiG). Whether the Kiev air force was active on the 17th at all is contested.⁹¹

For now, let us note only that in the days leading up to the downing of MH17, two unequivocal attempts were made by Kiev to turn the civil war into an international crisis by seizing on airplane crashes; one based on claims later withdrawn, the other, on a doubtful assertion not followed up. Would the downing of MH17, irrespective of who was responsible, and whether it was intentionally brought down or by accident, not have been seized on to raise the stakes even further? Parubiy's NSDC made the connection on 18 July, claiming that all three planes had been targeted '*from Russian territory*' – thus contradicting claims by Poroshenko and the interior ministry in Kiev the previous evening (see below).⁹²

While for Kiev and the NATO war party, drawing Russia into the fight may have had top priority, Washington also had other concerns worth raising the stakes for:

Putin's flight back from Brazil

Here we get to the heart of the question of motive: who might possibly have wanted to create a major international crisis if the downing was not an accident? On 17 July the Russian president flew back from Fortaleza in Brazil to Moscow in his official Ilyushin-96, 'Board One'. This concluded a six-day tour of Latin America that began in Cuba, where he wrote off 90 per cent of the Soviet-era Cuban debt, with the rest committed to common projects. He also made an unannounced stop in Nicaragua, before moving on to Argentina. There and in Brazil he signed contracts for nuclear reactors to be constructed by Russia's Rosatom on favourable conditions.⁹³ In Fortaleza, Putin then attended a meeting of the five heads of state of the BRICS countries to sign the charter of the New Development Bank, or BRICS bank.

For the Russian president, the Fortaleza meeting was a brief respite from an uninterrupted campaign of demonisation in the West. The BRICS abstained from criticising Moscow over the crisis in Ukraine and called instead for restraint by all parties so that the conflict might be resolved peacefully.⁹⁴ Still in Brazil, Putin also agreed with Angela Merkel, who was there for the finals of the football World Cup, to work on a tentative 'Land for Gas' deal to settle the Ukrainian crisis. On the way back to Moscow, the presidential plane passed over Warsaw about 200 miles (320 km), roughly half-an-hour's flying time, behind MH17, but then took the northerly route. This gave rise to speculation that MH17 had been mistaken for the Russian presidential Ilyushin. But first, let us look at the larger political stakes.

To begin with, the BRICS bank. The 2008 collapse hit the BRICS countries hard and it forced China, the bloc's locomotive, to leave the fast track for a slower lane. 'As growth slows in China and in the advanced industrial world', wrote Morgan Stanley economist Ruchir Sharma in 2012, 'these countries will buy less from their export-driven counterparts, such as Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, and Taiwan'. Their export performance had risen to around 6 per cent of GDP in the boom period, but now subsided

again to below 2 per cent, heralding hard times.⁹⁵ However, BRICS economic growth recovered and, by 2015, China's GDP would overtake the United States' in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms, India's advanced well beyond Japan's, and Russia and Brazil only had Germany among EU countries left in front of them.⁹⁶

In the wake of the financial crisis, the BRICS' long-standing difficulties with the Western financial system came to a head. Unlike Western finance or the patrimonial sovereign wealth funds of the Gulf monarchies, the BRICS need money capital for economic development first, like the investment banks in late-industrialising contender states such as France or Germany in the past.⁹⁷ So when the United States and the EU responded to the crisis by bailing out the banks and supplying them with new liquidity ('quantitative easing') to resume the predatory financial practices that had caused the crisis, the BRICS could not but try and shield their investment funds from it. Private finance for infrastructure fell sharply after the crisis and banks' willingness to lend (diminished also by Basle III capital requirements) did not recover in spite of massive liquidity injections; sovereign wealth funds and pension funds spend relatively little on infrastructure.⁹⁸ A BRICS development bank was to fill the gap. Its blueprint was worked out at meetings in Delhi and Durban in 2012–13, prompting Radhika Desai to write that 'Not since the days of the Non-Aligned Movement and its demand for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s has the world seen such a co-ordinated challenge to western supremacy in the world economy from developing countries'.⁹⁹

As their calls for a rupture with austerity and a more development-oriented regime at the IMF and World Bank continued to be rebuffed, the BRICS countries at the meeting in Fortaleza fast-forwarded the development bank plans.¹⁰⁰ The 'long-term implications for global order and development'¹⁰¹ were not lost on those watching this event. The creation of an equivalent of the World Bank with a capital of \$100 billion with a reserve currency pool of the same size (an equivalent of the IMF),¹⁰² laid the groundwork of a contender pole in the global political economy challenging the West's austerity regime frontally – or so it seemed at the time.

Putin also took home an agreement in principle for a 'Land for Gas' deal, agreed with Chancellor Merkel. It was intended to stabilise Ukraine's borders in exchange for Russian assistance in the country's financial rehabilitation. It involved tripartite negotiations between Russia, Germany and Kiev, with a crucial gas paragraph that had been entrusted to Firtash in Vienna, then still on the US wanted list. Where these negotiations had actually reached is not clear, but the thrust of the agreement was not in doubt. The gas paragraph would bring economic relief for the bankrupt country; in exchange Poroshenko would agree not to pursue NATO membership, whilst Putin would drop his objections to the free trade agreement with the EU. In addition the Russians were to compensate Ukraine for the loss of rental income for the Russian naval base at Sebastopol. However, the agreement to leave Crimea under Russian sovereignty met with a blanket Anglo-American rejection.¹⁰³

The fact is that when Putin was still in Brazil, on 16 July, the US slapped new sanctions on Russia. Washington briefed EU ambassadors with intelligence on the supply of heavy weaponry to the Donbass insurgency by Russia, but during the night of 16–17 July there was still intense transatlantic consultation going on. Merkel and Biden both called Poroshenko, and Merkel also conferred with Obama by telephone. Reporting this on the

17th, a pro-Kiev website impatiently commented, 'Everybody is waiting for the decision of the [European Council] regarding the tightening of the sanctions against the Russian Federation'.¹⁰⁴ A special Council meeting had in fact convened on the 16th but confined itself to stating intentions, since countries with export interests to Russia and dependent on its gas, were balking. Indeed, its communiqué stressed the EU's commitment 'to pursue trilateral talks on the conditions of gas supply from the Russian Federation to Ukraine' in order to 'safeguard the security of supply and transit of natural gas through Ukraine'. The next day Council president Herman van Rompuy again conceded there was no consensus yet.¹⁰⁵

The downing of MH17 changed all that. The 'Land for Gas' negotiations were promptly suspended and on the 22nd Europe dropped the remaining hesitations on the US sanctions package. As Mark Leonard, founder and director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, noted in a newspaper interview a year later, '*without MH17 it would have been pretty difficult to find sufficient support for the increased sanctions on the Russian economy*'.¹⁰⁶

The downing of MH17

The *cui bono* question concerning the MH17 disaster can be answered fairly conclusively, in the sense that it cleared the way for a renewed assault by the West on the Eurasian and BRICS contender postures for which Ukraine is a key battleground. Whether we are looking at an intentional act or an accident, and who actually pulled the trigger, are different matters. That the war party in Kiev had the means and the motive, as well as a track record of proven brutality, is not enough to make any claims in this respect. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will argue that the details surrounding the flight and the downing tend to cast the greatest suspicion on Kiev. As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), this was certainly confirmed by the *de facto* immunity from prosecution demanded by the Ukrainian regime and granted to it by its Western backers.

On the 17th, MH17 took off from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport en route to Kuala Lumpur. The flight's details, like all information about international flights including passenger lists, would have been shared with US intelligence as a matter of routine under anti-terror treaties with the EU. Advanced Passenger Screening, used to handle this information, has been developed by an Israeli-owned company, ICTS, headquartered at Schiphol. ICTS International NV was established under Dutch law in 1982 by former members of Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, and El Al security agents. The chairman of its board and majority owner since 2004 is Menachem J. Atzmon, who as co-treasurer of the Likud Party handled party funding from US sources until the late 1990s. Few companies are so involved with the terrorism/counterterrorism complex as ICTS. Its subsidiary, Huntleigh USA, shared security duties at Boston's Logan Airport, from where on 11 September 2001 the two planes that hit the Twin Towers took off. It lost this business following multiple lawsuits for negligence, with security at US airports taken over by the Transportation Security Administration. ICTS also permitted the Nigerian student, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallah, to slip past Schiphol's normally stringent security with explosives sewn in his underwear on Christmas Day 2009 and board a Northwest Airlines plane bound for Detroit.¹⁰⁷

In March 2014, Malaysian Airlines had already lost another Boeing 777, MH370, on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. That flight carried several hundred kilos of highly flammable lithium ion batteries (part of a Motorola shipment of two-and-a-half tons of electronic goods). Once ignited, lithium ion batteries release explosive hydrocarbon gases; they have caused many fatal on-board fires, the latest (confirmed) on a UPS cargo plane in 2010. This is also one explanation for the disappearance of Flight MH370.¹⁰⁸ An alternative theory, considered by Nigel Cawthorne's *Flight MH370: The Mystery*, is that a US–Thai military exercise was responsible. Without going further into these matters here, Cawthorne's book is important because it points to many issues that were also at play in the MH17 case, but without a propaganda war distorting them. That the transponder of MH370 was off when it disappeared, whilst the transponder of MH17 (which worked for another day after the crash) was removed but not returned, should not be taken lightly, given the growing role of electronic warfare, including the e-hijacking of planes.¹⁰⁹

MH17, too, carried a cargo of lithium ion batteries, in this case, 1,376 kilos, almost 10 per cent of the plane's total cargo weight of 17 tons. This is approximately six times the amount the FAA of the United States considers the limit of the fire-fighting capacity of a passenger plane.¹¹⁰ The batteries had been flown to Schiphol by TNT from Grèce-Hollogne airport near Liège, where there is a distribution centre for them (a subsidiary of a UK company). Since practically the entire production of these batteries takes place in East Asia, it is less likely that they were flown to Malaysia for regular consumer use. Lithium ion batteries are increasingly used in military applications, such as TOW anti-tank missiles, chemical detection systems and, of course, communication equipment.¹¹¹ The batteries on board MH17 were loaded in seven large packages in three containers, mostly stowed in the front cargo section (a smaller batch in the rear), with the bill of lading marked 'urgent'. The plane also transported an advanced electro-chemical resistance spectroscope, with which battery condition can be measured precisely. Finally, the Boeing carried a diplomatic pouch from the Malaysian embassy, packed at Schiphol by VCK Logistics Airfreight and designated in the bill of lading as 'Extremely urgent shipment, must fly as booked'.¹¹²

Malaysia Airlines was on a downward slope financially and had to make every possible buck, but that does not answer all questions.¹¹³ The precise nature of the plane's cargo, e.g., the presence of the batteries, whether they burned and exploded and, if not, what happened to them after the crash (or to the diplomatic pouch for that matter) would obviously all be part of a proper investigation, to which we get in [Chapter 5](#).

With two planes lost, it was inevitable that the question of the carrier's nationality would come up. Malaysia belongs to the category of states resisting neoliberal capitalism and the Anglo-American claim to global governance, perhaps more so under former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad than today.¹¹⁴ In November 2011, it incurred the wrath of the Western powers after the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal, in a trial that had taken two years, unanimously arrived at the verdict that Tony Blair and George W. Bush by their decision to invade Iraq were guilty of crimes against the peace, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The judges ruled that the names of Bush and Blair be inscribed in the register of war criminals kept by the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Commission and that the verdict be reported to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.¹¹⁵

Malaysia is also tangentially connected to the BRICS. The country has aerospace connections with Russia that include the prospective purchase of the Irkut MC-21 narrow-body passenger plane, a future competitor of the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737. It also ordered civilian versions of the Mi-17 and Ka-32 helicopters. In the months leading up to the MH17 disaster, Malaysia purchased Buk-M2E medium-range surface-to-air missile systems; the short-to-medium-range ground-based air defence system Pantsir-C1; anti-tank missile systems; as well as various types of navy patrol boats.¹¹⁶ Malaysia is certainly not the most popular state from the Western diplomatic perspective, so *if* perpetrators with a US and/or NATO connection intentionally downed MH17 to create an international crisis and overcome European hesitations, the 'choice' of Malaysian Airlines over Singapore Airlines and Air India, whose planes were ten and four minutes away, respectively, would broadly conform to a friend-foe rank order. If, on the other hand, the plane was mistaken for Putin's by perpetrators based in Kiev, the Malaysian Airlines colours are closest to the Russian presidential II-96.¹¹⁷ Here we should be reminded that we are looking at a 'systems event', a conditional structure of great complexity, in which even factors that are highly unlikely to have been the *cause* (such as punishing Malaysia or killing Putin) may yet have played a role, at some point, in overcoming moral or other barriers.

Who saw the plane on the 17th?

When Flight MH17 entered Ukrainian airspace, it was being monitored by NATO AWACS planes; possibly, by seaborne NATO radar in the Black Sea; by ground-based radar in Ukraine itself and in Russia; and by various satellites orbiting over the area. The plane also made regular satellite 'handshakes' to transmit technical data to Boeing HQ and to Rolls-Royce, the engine-maker; a routine procedure.¹¹⁸

NATO AWACS planes participated in the Black Sea manoeuvres and according to the German government in its replies to questions from the Left Party on 9 September 2014, two were aloft to monitor Ukrainian airspace on 17 July. They were stationed in Poland and Romania after a NATO Council decision in March to keep an eye on the evolving situation.¹¹⁹ To cover the civil war in the east, the planes would have had to cross into Ukrainian airspace, otherwise their patrols would make no sense. AWACS radar according to the Northrop Grumman catalogue has a 'beyond the horizon' (BTH) mode, in which a pulse radar allows it to look further than the 'more than 200,000 square miles (500,000 square km) around the plane, or greater than 250 miles (400 km) in all directions'.¹²⁰ So what did they see?

On 18 July, the German government requested the previous day's radar data from NATO. In its Bundestag statement of 9 September, it declared that 'Flight MH17 was being observed by radar and by the signals of the flight transponder it emitted directly. This stopped at [15.52 hours local time] when Flight MH17 left the space covered by the AWACS planes'.¹²¹ According to Berlin, the AWACS had picked up: (1) signals from active anti-aircraft missile systems classified as SA-3, a signal routinely picked up in the war zone; and (2) an unidentified radar signal (i.e. no transponder), which normally is a military plane.¹²² However, would the AWACS BTH function not have been able to continue to track the plane between 15.52 and 16.20 hours when it came down, a span

of 28 minutes? We do not know, but again, a proper investigation would no doubt look into these matters very closely.

Ground radar would have been able to track the entire flight. Ukraine was supposed to do this, indeed, it is legally obliged to do so under international aviation rules. However, the nearby radar at Artemivsk had been destroyed in the fighting, the next closest was too far away. The primary radar of Dnepropetrovsk air traffic control (ATC) was not functioning either; the one civilian radar in the east that covered the crash area, at Chuguiev, near Kharkov, was switched off, allegedly for scheduled maintenance.¹²³ Yet regular air defence of Ukraine had been put on 'readiness alert No 1' from 12 July, which explains the activated SA-3 radars observed by NATO AWACS, or Ukraine's Buk radars (nine Buk Kupol-M1 radars were active on 17 July).¹²⁴ However, these had not been integrated to back up the outage of Dnepropetrovsk ATC primary radar. Kiev denied that military radar was active that day, but that contradicts its own readiness order and ample evidence to the contrary.¹²⁵

DigitalGlobe monitored the city of Lugansk on 17 July and again, adjacent Russian territory, in the northeast corner of the sectors covered the day before (see Fig. 4.1). Its GeoEye 1 satellite apparently also made a picture of Makeevka, but that was removed from the DigitalGlobe public catalogue and surfaced only in the weeks prior to the JIT report in September 2016, now with the claim that it shows a column transporting a Buk.¹²⁶ The US military also had a satellite of their own in orbit, which the Russian top brass in their press conference of 21 July identified as specifically designed to monitor missile launches. 'US officials claim they have satellite photographs proving the Malaysian airliner was shot down by a missile launched by the militia [i.e., the insurgents]', the generals stated. 'But no one has seen these photographs so far. As far as we know, there was indeed a US satellite flying over south eastern Ukraine on July 17 from [16.06 to 16.21 hours]. This satellite is part of an experimental system designed to track and monitor the launches of missiles of various ranges.' By coincidence or otherwise, 'the US satellite flew over Ukraine at exactly the same time when the Malaysian airliner crashed'.¹²⁷

The reference here is to satellites with infrared detection, which can register a missile launch anywhere in the world, operated under the Defence Support Program of the US Air Force. It is no riddle why such a facility exists, for how otherwise would one be able to operate a missile defence system. On 1 August 2014, the Russian Ministry of Defence confirmed which type of satellite the military had been referring to: 'At the time specified, the American electro-optical reconnaissance satellite of the Keyhole series was flying over the crash site area'.¹²⁸ Since DigitalGlobe surveillance on the 16th according to Neogeography.ru was meant 'to have an accurate, up-to-date image to allow automated remote sensing from space', it may well have been that the Keyhole satellite was using this information, but we don't know. At any rate, the United States did not reply to the questions posed in the Russian military command's press conference, nor did it provide any satellite images, although after the disaster, it promptly came up with satellite photos of Russian troop concentrations on the Ukrainian border; so its high-resolution observation capacity was up and running.

The flight plan of MH17 routed the plane through the northern corridor once it entered Ukrainian airspace. It was supposed to climb to 35,000 ft, but Dnepropetrovsk air traffic control ordered it to slow down (to 490 miles/h) in order to remain at 33,000

ft (10 kilometres) to avoid other traffic. The instruction to remain at 10,000 metres was only confirmed one-and-a-half months later by the Dutch government, by then in charge of the two investigations; the Dutch media had remained completely silent on it too, turning a possibly innocent instruction into something suspect. Also the plane was instructed to fly further north because of thunderstorms.¹²⁹ The deviation to the north was about 14 kilometres. The Russian top brass in their 21 July press conference noted that after MH17 passed over Donetsk, 'we can see the plane manoeuvring to return to the corridor; yet the Malaysian crew did not get a chance to complete the manoeuvre. At [16.20 hours] the plane began to lose speed, and at [16.23 hours] it disappeared from Russian radars'.¹³⁰

Contending narratives in the propaganda war: the Buk theory

Immediately after the downing, both sides in the Ukrainian civil war and in the new Cold War in which it is embedded, launched into a propaganda contest to which the eventual investigations, too, fell victim. Bearing in mind that no conclusive evidence concerning ultimate responsibility is available, I will look at the different theories proposed, the Buk theory and the jet theory. The main problem with the theories assuming an intentional or accidental Buk missile launch is that the damage to the wreckage points to a lighter missile, which at the height MH17 was flying would imply an air-to-air missile. However, the alternative jet theories raise a host of further questions, and from both angles, obvious hoaxes have been floated as well. Let me go through the different versions.

Directly after his return to Moscow, Putin made a phone call to the White House. He expressed his dismay to Obama about the new round of sanctions imposed the day before, over which the EU was still prevaricating. In a tense conversation, the American president told his Russian counterpart that the reason was the supply by Moscow of arms to the insurgents, including anti-aircraft weapons. Half an hour into the conversation, Putin mentioned that a report on the downing of a civilian airliner had just come in.¹³¹ This was three hours and ten minutes after the actual crash. According to John Helmer, Obama did not bring up the downing, although he already knew about it and in the meantime had phoned Poroshenko and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, one hour before Putin rang.¹³² Obama's reference to the anti-aircraft weapons supplied by Russia of course fits into the narrative of a Buk launch (although the subsequent Dutch joint intelligence report denies such supply). The White House press statement of the Putin–Obama conversation starts by acknowledging that 'we do not yet have all the facts'. Given ubiquitous US intelligence assets monitoring Russia's perimeter generally and eastern Ukraine in particular, this can mean all kinds of things, including caution in light of the consequences of an outright accusation.¹³³

The rulers in Kiev, by contrast, were not restrained by any such caution and issued three explanations, of which the least plausible was expounded most aggressively and eventually became the leitmotiv for the Dutch-led investigations, as we see in the next chapter: Poroshenko spoke first of a tragic accident, before labeling the downing a 'terrorist act' and the Twitter message of the NSDC, cited above, claimed that as with two earlier downings that week, MH17 had been targeted *from Russian territory*. Now that it crashed within Ukraine, the only way to implicate Russia in a Buk

launch (given that NATO intelligence and Kiev denied the insurgents had them, and perhaps also because the earlier two claims did not add up), was to claim that the missile launcher had come from Russia and was sent back there again.¹³⁴ This was the theory launched first by the spokesman of the Kiev interior ministry, Anton Gerashchenko.

Still on the 17th, Geraschenko posted the widely disseminated picture of a white smoke trail against a clear blue sky (although the sky in that direction was overcast that afternoon¹³⁵) on his Facebook page. The picture was accompanied by the text:

Putin! You and your cronies will not escape from the International Tribunal. *This is a photo of the inversion of the footprint left behind after the launch of the Buk missile. Made after a few minutes in the third district of Torez from the West to the East. Thousands of people saw the launch and the flight of the rocket, which you lovingly gave your sponsored terrorists!*¹³⁶

However, of the 'thousands of people who saw the launch' none came forward. When a comet came down in an uninhabited part of Siberia a few years earlier, several people took pictures, but in relatively densely populated eastern Ukraine, no one apparently had their smartphone ready, although the blast of a Buk launch is hard to miss and the reverse trail remains in the air for ten minutes or so.

In a second posting that same evening, Gerashchenko came up with a picture of a Buk launcher, with the text 'here is further evidence for the International Tribunal: a Buk installation was passing through the city of Torez this morning!' Dutch blogger Hector Reban identified the photographer of both pictures and the man who delivered them to the interior ministry as known 'infowarriors' for Kiev.¹³⁷ On the 18th, Gerashchenko declared that the Buk launcher was back in Russia 'to be destroyed' – without explaining what purpose that would have served.¹³⁸ This time it was followed by an avalanche of pictures and testimonies of rogue Buk launchers driving or being transported through towns and villages, or parked there. Why a Buk from Russia would have required a stolen Volvo flatbed truck to transport it, as on several of these pictures, was not explained either.¹³⁹

Interior Minister Avakov now also issued a statement on his Facebook page (his favourite means of communication¹⁴⁰), in which he spoke of 'a track-mounted missile system, moving in the direction through Krasnodon, toward the border with the Russian Federation' at 04.50 hours on 18 July. 'Presumably this is the missile system "BUK" that yesterday fired on the civilian aircraft Amsterdam-Kuala Lumpur.'¹⁴¹ Even though the Buk launcher supposedly 'fleeing back to Russia' took 12 hours to cover the small distance whilst 'rushing home', the deputy editor of the English-language *Kyiv Post* (who doubles as CEO of Hromadske TV, another Western-oriented and -financed outlet) called this 'irrefutable evidence'.¹⁴²

Without going into detail, the United States and NATO broadly covered the claims of the Kiev interior ministry, with lasting consequences for the propaganda war. To remove any suspicion about a possible role of any of the four Ukrainian Buk regiments, of which the 156th was deployed in the area, the US embassy issued a statement that Ukraine had not fired a single Buk during the entire civil war.¹⁴³ At NATO headquarters, General Breedlove, in reply to an e-mail from Natalie Crawford at RAND, who referred to 'a tragedy', mailed back on the 18th, 'Not a tragedy in my book ... a crime. Russia's

fingerprints are ALL over this!!!' without further specification.¹⁴⁴ Hillary Clinton, taking aim at Merkel's 'Land for Gas' negotiations with Putin, in a TV interview on the 18th called for making 'Russia pay the price' once its culpability had been established. Her to-do list for the EU was, one, 'toughen sanctions'; two, find alternatives to Gazprom, and third, 'do more in concert with us to support the Ukrainians'.¹⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, Secretary of State Kerry claimed that 'We saw the take-off. We saw the trajectory, we saw the hit, etc.' but failed to provide details, then or since. State Department spokespeople referred to social media and 'common sense' as the best way of countering Russia's 'propaganda and misinformation'.¹⁴⁶ On 22 July, the day the EU conceded to join Washington's sanctions, the United States issued a 'U.S. Government Assessment' of the disaster, which contained one item of evidence – a commercial satellite picture taken in 2010, into which the presumed trajectory of a missile had been drawn in colour.¹⁴⁷

By then, anti-'Putin' indignation in Western media had secured solid public support for the claim that Moscow was behind it all. Yet, given the capability of the US surveillance apparatus, Washington's reticence to reveal the information in its possession in fact incriminates Kiev, with or without direct NATO complicity.

A rather more plausible explanation for a Buk launch was retrieved by Dutch MH17 blogger Max van der Werff. According to a GDR anti-missile engineer, Col. (ret.) Ralf Rudolph, a Buk unit of 156 AA regiment on the fatal date of 17 July had orders to conduct an exercise to prepare the National Guard and regular army assault to relieve the enclosed troops near Snizhne in the Donetsk sector (part of the attempt to break through from the south). In this account, confirmed by anonymous employees of the Kiev defence ministry, two Su-25s of 299 Tactical Aviation were to act as decoy targets. One was locked on to by the Buk radar just when MH17 passed over in the same flight path, much higher of course. The Boeing, the larger object, attracted the targeting system. In the evening of the 17th, at 21.30 local time, the crew of the Buk that by mistake had actually fired the missile, was taken into custody by the SBU and it was later learned that the flight controller at Mykolaiv air base had disappeared.¹⁴⁸ The function to automatically switch to a larger target had been introduced after earlier Buk types in the 1982 Lebanon war proved unable to recognise the real Israeli jets that followed waves of decoys. In the case of the less sophisticated TELAR radar, the improvement did not include friend-foe recognition or NCTR facility that would have allowed it to distinguish a civilian Boeing from an Su-25.¹⁴⁹ Was this then perhaps the Su-25 climbing towards MH17 that the Russian military referred to in their press conference?

However, in the documentary, *It was a MiG*, Col. (ret.) Sergey I. Balabanov, former commander of Ukraine's Air Command South/Task Force Crimea, relates how he called up his long-time friend, Col. Terebukha, the commander of 156 AA regiment, that same evening. He asked him: 'So you shot down the Malaysian plane, didn't you?' According to Balabanov's account, Terebukha, although emotional and switching from Russian to Ukrainian, emphatically denied that air defence had been responsible.¹⁵⁰

Problems with the Buk theory and with the jet alternative

Several military experts familiar with air defence from Soviet times went on the record to state that a Buk hit would have made the Boeing explode into a fireball, referring to

the enormous kinetic energy of the impacting shrapnel (small metal pellets). These East German and Romanian officers, and also Col. Balabanov cited above, further note that the sections into which the Boeing broke up, apart from the cockpit, had far too limited damage for a Buk hit.¹⁵¹ Indeed in 2001, the Ukrainian military during surface-to-air missile practice mistakenly targeted a Siberia Airlines plane, which exploded in mid-air; also, *in all ten cases* in which Russian jets were hit by Georgian Buk missiles during the war of 2008, the planes were destroyed in the air. Yet the pilots had time to eject and land by parachute, suggesting the pilots of the Boeing would have had a small window to raise the alarm, certainly if a Buk was coming right at them, in front (i.e. from insurgent-held Snizhne, as claimed by Kiev and the subsequent official investigations).¹⁵²

A Buk missile explodes at a certain distance from the target (10 to 20 metres according to different accounts) allowing maximum destruction of a fast-moving target, but the DSB Final Report maintains that the fatal warhead exploded four metres from MH17. The Russian Ministry of Defence aviation research office claimed the actual distance was 1.5 metres.¹⁵³ On 19 July, the ministry questioned the Buk theory on the grounds of the impact damage. 'Why does the downed aircraft show cladding damage characteristic [of] pin and shrapnel warheads (air-to-air systems) ... of R-27 TOPOR or R-73 missiles used on the Ukraine military MiG-29 and Su-27 aircraft?', it asked.¹⁵⁴ An air-to-air missile, e.g., an R-27, has a warhead mass half as large (30+ instead of 70 kilos) and a shrapnel count 14 times smaller than a Buk (which contains 7,800 pieces or more).¹⁵⁵ In 1978, a Soviet jet fighter fired two R-60 heat-seeking missiles at a Korean Airlines passenger jet, which on its route from Anchorage to Seoul, strayed into Soviet airspace; one struck the wing and fuselage, killing two people. Unlike the 1983 KAL drama, the plane was able to make an emergency landing on a frozen lake and 107 passengers came out alive.¹⁵⁶

The possibility that the cockpit of the Boeing had been targeted by jet cannon was also raised by Ukrainian-Canadian OSCE observer Michael Bociurkiw, one of the first to get to the scene of the disaster. On arrival, Bociurkiw was taken to a large section of the plane in a densely wooded area, with only two of 16 windows broken.¹⁵⁷ The cockpit section, which he inspected next, had holes that looked as if they had been caused by 'heavy machine gun fire' (i.e. jet cannon), but these can also have been impact holes of shrapnel from a missile. Bociurkiw also saw men with tools working on the cockpit wreckage. Other OSCE observers reported a large piece of wreckage being cut in half, and the BBC reported that pieces were being sawn off.¹⁵⁸ One video still shows a rectangular plate cut out from the crew deck, with the claim it contained evidence of 23 mm high-explosive incendiary tracer ammunition.¹⁵⁹

The military experts cited above adhered to the jet theory by choice or default, and as the title suggests, so does the documentary, *It was a MiG*. The Russian Union of Engineers in a report of 8 September 2014, signed by its vice-president, I.A. Andrievski, also claimed that the cockpit had been fired at by an unidentified jet fighter. With its engines still functioning, MH17 then would have continued on automatic pilot, only to be hit by one of the jet's missiles.¹⁶⁰ Doubts on a Buk hit and the possibility of a jet attack also were expressed in a BBC Russian Service report. Eyewitnesses filmed in that report claimed to have seen jet planes swirling around the Boeing after loud bangs were heard; witnesses making comparable statements appear in the *It was a MiG* documentary. Given

the partly overcast sky, we must be sceptical about this testimony as with eyewitness accounts generally. But the fact that the BBC documentary was removed from the BBC site, as was the YouTube version shortly thereafter, suggests it might contain evidence damaging to the Western narrative.¹⁶¹ On the basis of the Bociurkiw observations, the BBC Russian Service report, and other accounts, the Malaysian semi-official *New Straits Times* embraced the jet theory too.¹⁶²

One further account of a jet attack that contains important details, backed up by obviously authentic documents, was provided by a Russian informant of the German private investigator, Josef Resch. On the 15th, a plane (a 'Su', type number not specified and registration number blacked out) arrived from Kirovograd to Chuguiev (Kharkov oblast), both military airfields outside the regular order of battle (it was at Chuguiev that civilian radar was switched off, allegedly for maintenance).¹⁶³ The Sukhoi took the place of one of the planes slotted for operations on the 17th, with the order to shoot down an airborne target in the Snizhne–Torez–Grabovo triangle. A Buk unit was to cover the operation, but it did not fire. All pilots involved were then sent off to other bases; one intelligence officer involved was shot later, outside the combat zone. Resch and his team considered this a highly credible lead, but the anonymous client behind the \$30-million bounty was not interested, perhaps because of the informant's claim about the motive (downing Putin's presidential Il-96).¹⁶⁴ Indeed, in *It was a MiG*, Col. Balabanov explains that an operation of this type would have required elaborate planning, involving several levels of command. That an oligarch (he mentions Kolomoiskiy by name) would be able to send a jet up to settle private scores, is out of the question.¹⁶⁵

Jet theories discarded on other grounds include that of the Spaniard, 'Carlos'. His real-time Twitter messages about jets not part of the regular Ukrainian air force are plausible in light of other testimony, but the claim that he was a Borispol air traffic controller turned out to be false.¹⁶⁶ Also, a mechanic from an airbase in Dnepropetrovsk (who did work there) spoke of an Su-25 returning from a mission with its ammunition discharged and its pilot in distress and saying 'wrong plane'. The pilot, who was decorated for valour a few days later, vehemently denied he had even flown that day, and as discussed earlier, the Su-25 is the least likely type of plane for such a mission (and the mechanic would have known the difference).¹⁶⁷ Finally, former Lufthansa pilot Peter Haisenko claims the Boeing had been fired at, killing the pilots before decompression broke up the rest of the plane. Entry and exit holes on both sides are evidence of this. But Haisenko, too, speaks of an Su-25 with 30 mm armour-piercing ammunition, and this again is unlikely.¹⁶⁸

Now, why didn't the Russian state itself take control of the narrative here – instead of leaving it to the military and to private parties to reply to Western assertions? Is Moscow's overriding aim to avoid a complete rupture with Ukraine, or with the United States for that matter? Part of the explanation is certainly its obvious inability to manage the news to the degree the West can. The concerns of its military command about the threat posed by the operational, and potentially first-strike missile batteries in Romania may also have prevented it from giving any insight into the type, location, range or quality of its satellite and radar assets. Both aspects were also at play, on China's part, in the case of MH370.¹⁶⁹ 'Discovering' radar evidence on an Almaz-Antey disc would then be one way of dissimulating its true origin.¹⁷⁰ Even the Russian military in their press conference

of 21 July chose not to make firm assertions, but asked questions instead. First, these pertained to Ukrainian Buk units in the area, their radars, etc.; then the generals switched to the jet theory, asking what a plane climbing to a proximity of 3 to 5 kilometres to MH17 was doing there. 'Detecting the new aircraft became possible as it started to ascend. Further changes in the airborne object's coordinates suggest that it was hovering above the Boeing 777's crash site, monitoring the situation.'¹⁷¹

As suggested in the Introduction, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Moscow has other priorities in Ukraine than revealing the truth about MH17, and it may even want to protect high-level contacts in Kiev. It may also be that Russia keeps what it knows as a bargaining chip in its standoff with the United States and NATO, which adopt a comparable posture and even briefly considered a military intervention.

The Western military option

Whether the downing was a provocation to create an international crisis, or was merely seized on with the same intention, we do not know. Yet there is no doubt that a military intervention was briefly contemplated by Australia and the Netherlands (the two countries with the highest number of victims), with the United States apparently 'leading from behind'.

Dutch press reports of 20 and 21 July, concerning an impending operation from Poland, were dismissed by the defence ministry in The Hague, but pressure from key NATO capitals as well as Australia to adopt a more aggressive posture was mounting.¹⁷² A UN resolution demanding immediate access to the crash site (which was not in fact being denied) was being prepared by Britain and Australia; UK Prime Minister David Cameron and the US president are cited in Dutch government documents as calling for strong sanctions against Russia, again 'to ensure access'. Obama now joined the chorus claiming that the plane had been downed by insurgents with Russian support, calling on the EU to take a stronger stand against Moscow.¹⁷³

On 24 July 2014, after attending the ceremony at Eindhoven airport for the return of victims' remains, the Dutch government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte repaired to The Hague to discuss a military operation, drafting the obligatory 'Article 100' procedure to inform parliament. On the same day, Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans travelled to Kiev, as did his Australian colleague, Julie Bishop. Rutte, meanwhile, had spoken on the phone with Poroshenko in Kiev and Putin in Moscow, but not with the insurgents, who were obviously off-limits. Never mind that Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak was at the crash site and had already received the plane's black boxes from them two days earlier. The Australian prime minister, Tony Abbott, dispatched former Defence Force chief Angus Houston to Ukraine, whilst publicly claiming that Putin was not averse to a UN resolution mandating the deployment of troops in the disaster zone. Yet, whether the UN route would be taken at all was uncertain, and whatever Rutte or Abbott may have discussed with Putin, it is hard to imagine Moscow would have accepted such a military operation. In fact, the Dutch had already switched to the position that an OK from Kiev would be a sufficient mandate to dispatch the troops.¹⁷⁴

On 25 July, the populist but usually well-informed Dutch daily, *De Telegraaf*, reported that all leaves of 11th Air Mobile Brigade, 4,500 strong, had been cancelled and that they would be flown from their two bases in the Netherlands to the Donetsk area in eastern Ukraine over the weekend of 26–27 July. In addition, special forces then in Mali were being recalled. Whilst Dutch government documents confirm this intent, Rutte commented that a military expedition was still ‘far from certain’.¹⁷⁵ The next day, *De Telegraaf* specified that Dutch commandos would be deployed in a joint operation with the Australian SAS regiment, which the defence ministry in The Hague called ‘pre-mature’ – and it was. 11 Air Mobile forms part of the bi-national rapid intervention division, Division Schnelle Kräfte, which is under German command, and Berlin vetoed the dispatch of the troops. On Monday 27 July, Rutte announced that the plan to deploy 11 Air Mobile was off the table. This was confirmed by a cabinet decision the next day (‘too risky’).¹⁷⁶

According to John Helmer, the Americans and Australians continued to plan for an operation, only calling it off on 5 August. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott (who after his ouster in September 2015 became one of Poroshenko’s international advisers) in a radio interview later confirmed these discussions. On the 11th, Abbott, accompanied by the Australian military and police chiefs, visited The Hague, and that was it – except for reports that in the upcoming Dutch defence budget discussions, substantial increases in expenditure would be proposed (these have since been made).¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the propaganda war blaming Russia, and ‘Putin’ in particular, had been won already and it was now a matter of consolidating that success. Everything else – the official enquiries, East–West diplomacy, NATO strategy, and ongoing media coverage and comment – would be subordinated to that goal.

Notes

- 1 Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 131.
- 2 Gen. (ret.), Pyotr S. Deinekin, the former supreme commander of the long-range air force of the USSR and Russia, raises this possibility in Bruce Grant’s documentary, *It was a MiG* [MH17 Inquiry, 5th episode], 2016 (online).
- 3 For details and sources see my *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq*. London: Pluto and New Delhi: Sage Vistaar, 2006, p. 236.
- 4 A fourth version, issuing from the head of the notorious intelligence service SBU, Valentin Nalivaychenko – that it was an attempt by the rebels to provoke a Russian intervention by downing an Aeroflot airliner, which ended up being aimed at the wrong plane – is best forgotten.
- 5 James Sherr, ‘A war of narratives and arms’. In K. Giles, P. Hanson, R. Lyne, J. Nixey, J. Sherr and A. Wood, *The Russian Challenge* [Chatham House Report, June]. London: The Institute of International Affairs, 2015, p. 26.
- 6 Serhiy Kudelia, ‘The Donbas rift’ [trans. P. Golub]. *Russian Politics and Law*, 54 (1) 2016 [orig. in *Kontrapunkt*, no. 1 2015], pp. 10, 11.
- 7 Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 148–9.
- 8 Volodymyr Ishchenko, ‘Ukraine’s fractures’ [interview]. *New Left Review*, 2nd series (87) 2014, p. 28.
- 9 Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*. Atlanta: Clarity Press 2017, p. 124.
- 10 Eric Zuesse, ‘Oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi: Washington’s “Man in Ukraine”’. *Global Research*, 18 May 2014 (online); Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 127–8.

- 11 Sergii Leshchenko, 'Ukraine's puppet masters: a typology of oligarchs'. *Transit*, 45, 15 May 2014 (online).
- 12 *Observer Ukraine*, 'Kolomoisky's fall undermines Poroshenko as well'. 27 March 2015 (online); *Wikipedia*, 'Mikhailo Dobkin'.
- 13 De Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p. 48; Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 150–1.
- 14 References are to the original mails on the *DCLeaks* website.
- 15 Crawford e-mail to Breedlove, 24 March 2014; reply Breedlove, 27 March 2014.
- 16 Dan Briody, *The Iron Triangle: Inside the Secret World of the Carlyle Group* [foreword C. Byron]. Hoboken: John Wiley, 2003, pp. 35–7, 40.
- 17 Christoph Schult and Klaus Wiegrefe, 'Dangerous propaganda: network close to NATO military leader fueled Ukraine conflict'. *Der Spiegel*, 28 July 2016 (online).
- 18 Karber e-mail to Clark, 5 April 2014, reply Clark, 5 April.
- 19 Clark e-mail to Karber, 6 April 2014; Karber reply, 6 April; see *Russia Today*, 'Breedlove's war: emails show ex-NATO general plotting US conflict with Russia'. 1 July 2016 (online).
- 20 A. Pinchuk e-mail to Karber, 6 April 2014; Karber e-mail to A. Pinchuk, 7 April 2014; A. Pinchuk e-mail to Karber, 8 April 2014, emphasis added. The 'first phase' was the Crimean secession.
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- 177 MSJ, Doc. A 55, 11 August 2014. In the Dutch government documents obtained by *RTL Nieuws*, so much is blacked out that little can be gained from them concerning the internal discussions. *RTL Nieuws*, 'Stukken MH17 openbaar'. 11 February 2015 (online). Helmer, 'The Obama shoe-banging moment'.

Aftermath: A failed state on NATO's frontline

The downing of MH17 swept aside EU reservations about the new round of US sanctions against Russia announced the day before and killed the 'Land for Gas' negotiations at one stroke. It also set the planned South Stream energy link to Europe back while accelerating Kiev's efforts to uncouple the Ukrainian economy from Russia's defence-industrial base. The West was clearly ready to scuttle the chances for a compromise settlement and leave Ukraine an economic wasteland and a failed state as the price of weakening the foundations of the loose contender bloc encompassing the Eurasian Union, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. How the Trump presidency will affect the balance of international forces over Ukraine remains to be seen, but so far in recent history there are no instances of the United States withdrawing from a warlike posture.

In this concluding chapter I first look at how giving Kiev a veto over the two official investigations into the MH17 disaster fundamentally compromised the outcomes. The final report of the Dutch Safety Board (DSB) entrusted with the technical investigation and the findings so far of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) tasked with the criminal prosecution do not depart from the claims made by the hardliners in the Ukrainian interior ministry and their Western backers directly after the disaster, although the JIT investigation did appear to be tugging at the leash at times. The DSB claims that the Boeing was downed by a Buk missile fired from rebel-held Snizhne, although the damage to the plane appears inconsistent with a hit from such a heavy missile. The DSB bases its claim on two bowtie-shaped particles found in the wreckage (out of the two-and-a-half thousand that explode from a Buk warhead) and its report misrepresents or obfuscates information regarding other topics, such as the plane's cargo or the radar data at its disposal. The JIT took the highly questionable DSB findings as its starting point, adding the Gerashchenko-Avakov account of a Buk launcher transported from Russia and brought back there after having fired its one fatal shot. That Western media and politics cheered incriminating telephone intercepts provided exclusively by the criminal Ukrainian intelligence service, SBU, as 'irrefutable proof' only underlines their political nature.

That the West exploited the disaster is indisputable, as is the scorched-earth policy it pursued towards Ukraine, which I review in the second part of the chapter. The book concludes with an account of how the neoliberal 'market democracy' experiment failed. Supervised by expatriate financiers, and apparently aimed at securing control of the

country's energy infrastructure for the West, it merely contributed further to making Ukraine a social disaster zone and a failed state on the NATO frontline.

The Kiev veto in the MH17 investigation

Since MH17 was downed in its airspace, Ukraine was responsible for the technical investigation of the disaster. The fact that Kiev allowed civilian airliners to fly across a war zone raised the responsibility to the level of criminal liability; indeed the possibility that its air force and/or air defence forces were also *directly* involved in bringing the plane down, by intent or accident, or whether there were other perpetrators, would have to be looked into as well.¹ How the veto power awarded to the regime in Kiev was obtained, will be our first concern. It was seen as suspicious even in Ukraine itself, but in the West, the mainstream media's more or less exclusive focus on Moscow's and/or the insurgents' culpability aborted such suspicions. With back-up from 'citizen journalists', of which 'Bellingcat', launched on 15 July 2014, became the best known, this sealed the anti-'Putin' consensus.

Towards Kiev's veto

Local officials, armed insurgents, civilian volunteers, as well as OSCE observers, rushed to the crash site near Grabovo (Ukr: Hrabove) immediately after MH17 had come down. The insurgents announced they would down arms for three days to allow rescue and recovery operations. They also guaranteed the safety of anyone taking part, including those under the authority of the regime in Kiev – if unarmed.² There may indeed have been regime operatives in the field, such as the men seen working on the wreckage with tools by the OSCE's Michael Bociurkiw. Who they were remains uncertain, but that there was plenty of opportunity for planting or removing evidence cannot be in doubt.

Frontlines in a civil war are always porous and, in this case, state institutions had not been yet completely separated either. There were still regional security officers who considered themselves under the command of the central authorities in Kiev. The SBU had left Donetsk in May already; local security was made the responsibility of an Internal Security Service (MVD) answerable to the insurgency. For others, command structures were still blurred. Thus police colonel A.V. Gavrilyako, the department head of the Prosecutor General Office's in Makeevka (just north-east of Donetsk) was instructed by the insurgent MVD to investigate the crash, but he first wanted to check with his regular superior, a Col. Goncharov, who still obeyed the central PGO. After getting the go-ahead, Gavrilyako drove to Grabovo with two cars in the early hours of the 18th. However, he was then contacted again by Goncharov, who on instruction from Kiev ordered him to turn back immediately. Since Gavrilyako was not in command of the convoy himself, he could not obey and henceforth took orders from the authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). When he tried to contact his regular Ukrainian superiors again the next day, he was told that only the SBU was allowed to investigate. That clearly was meant to dissuade any DPR role in the investigation. However, since the SBU did not show up in the disaster zone, at least not officially, the insurgents were in charge – until dislodged by advancing Ukrainian military units seeking to exploit the situation.³

The Dutch government, soon to be given charge of the investigation, ruled out any dealings with the insurgency. After Foreign Secretary Timmermans at the UN called local volunteers 'thugs' on 21 July, and falsely accused them of robbing the victims' corpses, the option of negotiating with the insurgents was effectively closed. Although the Dutch government later apologised, contact was now only possible via the OSCE. A Dutch public prosecution team did fly to Ukraine, but it remained in Kiev to discuss matters with the coup government. Australian experts on the other hand arrived at the scene of the disaster without delay, as did a Malaysian team led by Prime Minister Najib Razak. As noted, it received the Boeing's black boxes from the insurgents without any fuss and passed them on to the Netherlands on 22 July. When the recorders were forwarded to London for analysis, Kiev, apparently concerned they would reveal damaging information, claimed that the insurgents had manipulated them, something that is practically impossible.⁴

Meanwhile the regime's troops were advancing in spite of a truce for an area of 40 kilometres around the crash site announced by Poroshenko. As the Infonapalm website of the fiercely anti-Russian interior ministry spokesman and NSDC member, Anton Gerashchenko, later reported, they took Debaltsevo 'shortly after the tragic shoot down of flight MH17 by a Muscovite Surface to Air Missile', and by 28 July, were pushing further along a corridor to the high ground of Saur Mohyla that effectively separates the two insurgent provinces.⁵ Also on the 28th, one day after plans for deploying 11 Air Mobile brigade had been shelved, Timmermans was in Kiev to discuss security, because the crash site was under fire from the Ukrainian side. This chain of events cannot fail to prompt the suspicion that Kiev had something to hide, certainly after the regime refused to call a halt to the fighting when asked to do so.⁶

Already on 23 July, the Dutch Safety Board (DSB, *Onderzoeksraad voor Veiligheid*, OVV) had negotiated an institution-to-institution (rather than state-to-state) agreement with Ukraine's National Bureau of Air Accidents Investigation of (NBAAI), giving the Dutch the leading role in the technical investigation of the disaster. The agreement crucially included a clause about *keeping information received by the investigation secret*. On this condition Dutch and Australian officials gained access to the crash site on 31 July.⁷ However, what unfolded upon their arrival the next day only raised more questions. While searching an area considered safe (i.e. under Ukrainian control), the inspectors came under mortar fire from government positions. On 4 August, Kiev forces reportedly advanced further; Dutch-Australian repatriation teams returning from the crash site passed military columns moving in the opposite direction.⁸ On 6 August, the Dutch investigators, who had been at the crash site barely 20 hours and covered an area of 3.5 out of 60 km², retrieving some large pieces of wreckage, withdrew again without having inspected the crucial cockpit section or taking top soil samples. When local officials showed them photos of the co-pilot found strapped in his seat, whose shirt 'looked like a sieve', they were not interested although this was obviously highly significant information. They also refused to accept DNA samples when asked to sign for receipt, apparently to avoid any official dealings with the insurgency.⁹

Meanwhile a political crisis had erupted in Kiev when parliament refused to accept a budget intended to meet stringent IMF criteria and Svoboda and Klitschko's UDAR (which supported the government in parliament) left the coalition. With the second tranche of the IMF's \$17.5 billion credit line blocked as a result, Yatsenyuk tendered

his resignation on 25 July, arguing that he would no longer be able to pursue the war without new money: that would merely risk the 'demoralisation of the spirits of those tens of thousands of people who are sitting not in this hall, but in trenches under bullets'. The vice-premier responsible for the MH17 portfolio, Volodymyr Groysman, took over as interim head of government. Elections were announced for October. Though parliament rejected Yatsensuk's resignation on the 31st, frontline fighters, alarmed about the governmental deadlock amidst rumours of a Russian invasion, were not appeased.¹⁰

On 6 August, the day Dutch investigators withdrew from the Grabovo crash site, paramilitary battalions staged threatening demonstrations in Kiev, raising the prospect of a new coup. The next day, 7 August, Andriy Parubiy, a key figure in the seizure of power and the civil war, unexpectedly resigned from the National Security and Defence Council. Though according to Wikipedia, he declined to comment on his motives 'in time of war', others reported that his 'move [was] mostly provoked by the fact he did not get an extended ethnic cleansing overdrive in Eastern Ukraine, and had to endure a ceasefire'.¹¹ There was, in fact, no ceasefire; even Poroshenko's order for a local truce after the downing of MH17 had been ignored. However, the extremists were rampant and reining them in was increasingly urgent. This was the situation in which NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen turned up in Kiev on 7 August. Was it to ensure that, with the crucial NATO summit in Wales less than a month away (4–5 September), the narrative of 'Putin' as the new threat to the alliance would not be spoiled by Ukrainian ultras? Certainly the official reason offered – that the trip was about the NATO trust fund for the purchase of communication equipment – was not credible; that matter had already been settled in June. Ukraine's representative at NATO headquarters was tight-lipped, saying only that the trip would be extremely brief, a few hours at most.¹² When Rasmussen landed, tanks were patrolling the streets of Kiev; whether to ward off a new *coup d'état* or consolidate the situation after averting one, we do not know.¹³

Gordon Hahn, a seasoned observer of the post-Soviet space, ventures to suggest that Parubiy may have calculated he was better out of government should the militias attempt a seizure of power; this is not incompatible with another suggestion that he stepped down to 'focus on his work supporting the volunteer militias'.¹⁴ These suggestions, if held out, would bring us a step closer to why Rasmussen flew to Kiev, namely, to reinforce Poroshenko's position amid coup threats and removing extremists like Parubiy from overall control of the armed forces. As Rasmussen declared on receiving the inevitable medal from the president, 'We stand by Ukraine and *your struggle to uphold the fundamental principles on which we have built our free societies*'.¹⁵ Unless it was routine rhetoric, this may well have been intended as a NATO endorsement of a president disobeyed by his troops and directly threatened by the most militant units.

Of course, much of this is conjecture, however suggestive, but there is more. Still on the same day, 7 August, the Netherlands, Belgium and Australia agreed with Kiev on the format of the criminal investigation of the MH17 disaster through the JIT, under the proviso that the publication of any findings would require the consent of the four parties.¹⁶ (Malaysia was added later given its overwhelming stakes in the matter.) This effectively removed the other seven countries that lost citizens in the MH17 disaster and which had been part of the preliminary consultations on the JIT, from any role in determining its further course. It also removed the investigation from the auspices of an EU

institution, Eurojust in The Hague, by which the JIT had been formed. The Dutch public prosecution service (Openbaar Ministerie, OM) was entrusted with the coordination of the criminal investigation.¹⁷

Though Ukraine is not a member of Eurojust and there were no Ukrainians on the plane, the 7 August agreement not only brought Ukraine on board but, through the consent provision, also gave the Kiev government 'an effective veto over any investigation results that attributed blame to them, an astonishing situation and probably without precedent in modern air crash investigations'.¹⁸ Ukraine now enjoyed a double indemnity: having absolved it from the responsibility of investigating the disaster, the West now handed it entirely unwarranted rights over the outcome of the investigation. Was this part of a deal in which Kiev removed Parubiy in return for immunity from prosecution over the downing of MH17, also saving the NSDC secretary personally from implication? It may be pertinent here that the acting Ukrainian Air Force commander at the time the Boeing was shot down, Lt. Gen. Serhiy Drozdov, was transferred to the reserve not long afterwards, without official explanation – only to be promoted to air force commander again in July 2015.¹⁹

When the notoriously loose-lipped public prosecutor of the Kiev regime, Yu. Boychenko, leaked news of the veto on 8 August, Ukraine's press agency, UNIAN, concluded that this effectively exculpated Russia and the insurgents from responsibility. Why otherwise would Kiev have insisted on the veto? The Dutch government, too, only acknowledged the unanimity agreement after a Freedom of Information request by the magazine, *Elsevier*.²⁰ The fact that the very same day, 7 August, forensic evidence from the crash site was already confidentially shared with the Ukrainian military, certainly highlights how concerned the rulers in Kiev were.²¹

Framing the MH17 narrative

At no point did the Western mainstream media stray from NATO and Kiev's premature assessment that 'Putin' was responsible for shooting down Flight MH17. For them, the only remaining question was whether it was carried out by actual Russians or by insurgents with Russian support. The *New York Times* provided the first overarching narrative, most of which was later disproved. Insurgents first shot down the An-26 transport plane with a Buk; residents saw them fire one on the 17th, and 'American intelligence analysts ... traced the launch to an area around Snizhne'. The plane then 'exploded in midair'.²² The *Washington Post* even quoted Parubiy, as if his testimony that 'It will be hard to conduct a full investigation with some of the objects being taken away, but we will do our best',²³ were enough to set all minds at rest. In CNN's coverage, 'Russia is clearly described as the aggressor not only providing arms, material, training and financing to the separatists, but also sending its regular troops with no flags or uniforms that enter Ukraine freely and shoot down Ukrainian military jets'.²⁴

The mainstream media, in other words, concluded the investigation long before any official verdict. The fact that Buk missile systems, like all other Soviet-era armaments of course, are 'Russian-made' was exploited for all that it was worth. Putin's picture was splashed across the front pages of Western newspapers reporting the disaster; with analyses of his personality and background as a KGB officer liberally seasoned

with malice.²⁵ The *New York Times* in a September 2016 comment on the JIT progress report and the breakdown of the ceasefire in Syria, entitled 'Vladimir Putin's outlaw state', recommended steps to ensure Russia's isolation, even hinting that it could be removed from its permanent membership of the UN Security Council.²⁶

A key role in keeping alive the anti-Russian narrative, and more particularly, the original Gerashchenko/Avakov account of a Buk launcher transported from Russia and back again, was played by the London-based website, Bellingcat. Its founder, Eliot Higgins, had already made his name ('Brown Moses') as a peddler of false claims. Never mind that his 2013 assertion that the Assad regime in Syria was responsible for a chemical attack in Ghouta, challenging veteran journalist Seymour Hersh, was exposed as bunk by MIT scientists. As we know from the cases of the fictional Gulf of Tonkin attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats or Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, this sort of reporting has long served to massage the public into supporting military adventures that would otherwise provoke resistance.²⁷

Higgins, metamorphosed into Bellingcat (it came online under this name on 15 July 2014, two days before the downing of MH17), won wide recognition for his bold assertions concerning the disaster, most of it directly traceable to Kiev. The same material was disseminated by a German equivalent, KorrekTV, from 28 July onwards.²⁸ How Bellingcat acquired its resonance deserves a dedicated study; perhaps its foremost role was to allow the established media to 'report' its highly questionable findings as fact. Certainly it secured its founder and Bellingcat a place in the Atlantic security infrastructure including the Gerashchenko network.²⁹ In mid-2015, Higgins co-authored a report for the Atlantic Council, the key NATO planning forum, on the 'Russian war in Ukraine'. He presented it in the European Parliament at the invitation of Guy Verhofstadt, whilst earning an accolade from General Breedlove for Bellingcat's work on tracking Russian troop movements in Ukraine. Higgins is a Non-Resident Fellow of the Atlantic Council's New Information Frontiers Initiative and a Visiting Research Associate at the Centre for Science and Security Studies in the Department of War Studies, King's College London.³⁰

One of Bellingcat's boldest claims was that it had the names of the men of the Russian 53rd Buk brigade, based in Kursk, which supposedly transported the TELAR to Donetsk and back again, which would have been an act of war on the part of Russia. The same story was also disseminated by KorrekTV. Certainly there were occasional doubts about Bellingcat's findings also in the mainstream media but on the whole its reputation remained above suspicion.³¹ The opening shot in the Dutch referendum campaign on Ukraine's EU association in early 2016 was a broadcast on all channels that Bellingcat had just 'discovered' that the downing of MH17 had been ordered by Putin personally.

The technical investigation and the DSB report

In the Netherlands, as in the West generally, media, politicians and the public alike are largely oblivious of the more than 13,000 dead and the more than a million refugees caused by Kiev's Anti-Terrorist Operation. They treat the downing of MH17 as a stand-alone disaster; an isolated terrorist act with 298 victims. The DSB's technical investigation would confirm that conclusion. Its head, Tjibbe H.J. Joustra, had been the National Anti-terrorism Coordinator from 2004 to 2009, and it was unlikely that he would come

up with results outside the purview of the Western security establishment. If this was not enough, Joustra had been forced to resign from the Dutch unemployment benefit office, UWV, for misappropriation of funds, making him vulnerable should he fail to toe the line. His closeness to the governing liberal party VVD (he co-authored its election programme), and his unwillingness to use international contacts were both criticised in Dutch media.³²

The DSB delivered an interim report on 6 September 2014, three weeks late. Yet an American aviation expert characterised its 34 pages as 'akin to a 15 year old turning in a paper lifted from *Wikipedia* at the last minute', whilst a Russian newspaper summarised its verdict as 'the plane had come down'.³³ The Russian government would also complain about the quality of the report at a UN Security Council meeting on 17 September, asking particularly why radar images of what appeared to be a second, military plane near MH17, which they had made available to the DSB, had not been considered. Moscow now proposed to entrust the investigation to an international commission headed by a special UN representative, but this was duly rejected. Thereafter, Russia itself appeared to lose interest in the jet theory and would no longer bring it up officially.³⁴

In the weeks that followed, the public was treated only to further demonstrations of the sheer scale of the obstruction and obfuscation which shrouded the disaster. No US radar data were made available and on 9 September, in its reply to the Left Party, the German government stated that given its obligation of secrecy it could not supply information concerning US radar data either; nor confirm whether it actually had any.³⁵ Similarly, when Dutch opposition MPs inquired whether the 23 July agreement with Kiev was obstructing a proper report, the Rutte government replied on 19 September that the agreement *was not amenable to being made public*. The Hague also revealed that an assistant of Ivo Opstelten, the minister of security and justice at the time of the downing, destroyed the department's entire e-mail correspondence on MH17. The disclosure was probably inadvertent, since this potentially constitutes a criminal act. The Hague also postponed setting up an archive on the disaster until after the general election of March 2017.³⁶

On 27 September, the Malaysian transport minister accused Kiev of sabotaging the investigation by denying his countrymen access to the crash site and announced that Kuala Lumpur would ask the UN to intervene.³⁷ Meanwhile, the Ukrainian side continued to provide grist for the anti-Russian media mill with SBU chief Valentyn Nalivaychenko claiming on TV in October that the Buk used in downing MH17 was a modernised Buk M1, which had to have been fired by Russian personnel. In fact, as discussed in [Chapter 4](#), the upgraded model is a Ukrainian version that became operational at the start of the July offensive.³⁸

The draft DSB report was circulated to the contracted parties – including, significantly, the United States as the producer of the Boeing, and Britain for the Rolls-Royce engines – on 2 June 2015. A month later, Malaysia and the Netherlands unexpectedly tabled a UN Security Council resolution to establish an international tribunal on the disaster. Whether this was because they saw no progress as long as Kiev (through its air safety board) had a veto, cannot be confirmed.³⁹ When Russia vetoed the resolution because neither the technical investigation nor the criminal investigation were complete, a by now entirely predictable storm of indignation broke in the Western media, which

chose to interpret this as confirming Moscow's guilt once again. There was little to back up this high-handed verdict. The Lockerbie tribunal, the supposed gold standard of international investigations of air disasters, was a cover-up that produced a serious miscarriage of justice by confirming Libyan guilt where none existed.⁴⁰ Finally, in September 2015 Oleg Storchevoy, deputy director of the Federal Air Transport Agency of Russia (FATA) and responsible for the MH17 investigation in his country, wrote to the DSB to point out key inaccuracies in what had come out so far, but he received no reply.⁴¹

In October 2015, chairman Joustra presented the final DSB report in a hangar with the partially reassembled Boeing. An eerie light show illuminated the event; no questions were allowed, for the good reason that the report was full of holes. While the claim that only one airline had stopped flying over eastern Ukraine for safety reasons when, in fact, five had,⁴² might be overlooked as a slip, the conclusion that the plane was hit by a '9N314M-model warhead carried on the 9M38-series [NATO designation SA-11 *Gadfly* series] of missiles, as installed on the BUK surface-to-air missile system', *without* specifying whether it was the version in use in Ukraine or a Russian one,⁴³ was hardly up to the standards expected from a credible inquiry. The German private investigator, Josef Resch, who tracked down a whistleblower on the downing, wondered whether this apparent oversight was necessary to make the report fit in with the 'sabre-rattling polemics of NATO generals'.⁴⁴ Let me review the main arguments that can be raised against the DSB final report.

One: the missile particles. The new version of the Buk missile (9M38M1) is charged with one part bowtie- or butterfly-shaped shrapnel; according to the Russian producer of the system, Almaz-Antey, the older version does not have bowtie-shaped shrapnel. The DSB's conclusion that the plane was downed by a Buk rested on *two* bowtie-shaped particles, out of a potential two-and-a-half thousand such pieces in a Buk missile warhead (the others are cube-shaped, of which also two were considered as evidence). One bowtie particle was found in the heavily targeted cockpit and one in a pilot's body, but this was a pilot from the B-Team not in the cockpit at the time of the hit (on long-distance flights there are two teams of pilots).⁴⁵ A third bowtie particle was discovered later in the back of the wreckage, where it is supposed to have ended up after an adventurous trip through the entire length of the plane and then miraculously stuck to the inside of a piece of debris, which a Dutch blogger documented had been turned upside down in the meantime. Nevertheless, the shrapnel piece was shown to international experts paraded on the Dutch RTL TV channel, again as 'irrefutable proof' of Russian involvement.⁴⁶

After the publication of the DSB report, Oleg Storchevoy of the Russian FATA again wrote to chairman Joustra, questioning the conclusion about a Buk missile, the angle at which it allegedly hit the plane and therefore the location from which it had been launched, and the assumption that other Buk launchers than those belonging to the Ukrainian military had been active in the area. Storchevoy compared the DSB's findings with those of a field test conducted on a (static) II-86 carcass by Almaz-Antey. In the test, some 1,500 clear bowtie-shaped holes were made in the fuselage skin and many came out on the other side again (none of either in the case of the Boeing). Storchevoy also asks how it was possible that the two 'official' bowtie pieces lost a quarter to one-third of their mass and more than 60 per cent of their thickness and yet retained their tell-tale

bowtie shape, when the average loss of mass in the Almaz-Antey tests was only 3 to 12 per cent. What does the shape of the two pieces still count for if so much metal is gone? Also, the missile tail fragment recovered on the crash site was practically undamaged, whereas in the tests, the missile body exploded into formless shapes.⁴⁷

Two: the available radar evidence. The DSB report does not pursue the crucial NATO AWACS information provided to it by the German government, which included information about Ukrainian SA-3 radars being activated and an unidentified radar signal. Instead, the report merely cites General Breedlove's claim that 'NATO AWACS aeroplanes did not have information pertinent to the investigation'.⁴⁸ As to US satellites, which according to Secretary of State Kerry had seen it all, Jousra declared on Dutch TV that he had been privy to what they had observed but what he had seen was a 'state secret'. It had been incorporated into the report, yet he was not entitled to say which specific information it was. Here we should be reminded that CIA researchers discussed the evidence with Dutch investigators in secret before the final report was published.⁴⁹ Why Dnepropetrovsk air traffic control and Chuguiev radars had both been switched off on the fatal day (ensuring that there would be no Ukrainian radar evidence covering the disaster zone), the report does not ask.⁵⁰ It does castigate Russia for supplying only processed radar data (signals turned into pictograms), but Moscow claimed that since the crash occurred outside its territory, there was no obligation to store the raw data (a rule changed by the ICAO in October 2016).⁵¹

In fact, the Russians had also noticed an unidentified second object, although this was probably not the same that NATO AWACS radar had seen according to the German government's statement. According to the Russian military, at [16.21'35 hours], when the plane had already been hit and slowed down to 200 km/h, 'a new mark detecting an airborne object appears at the spot of the Boeing's destruction. This new airborne object was continuously detected for *the duration of four minutes* by the radar stations Ust-Donetsk and Buturinskaya'. Whilst radar distortion cannot be excluded here, debris would not have remained up in the air for so long.⁵² Whether this was a plane circling around the broken up passenger plane, as many witnesses claim to have seen, cannot be established. The DSB report actually mentions the second object too, claiming it was debris; but in the appendix it confirms the four minutes+ airborne duration also noted by the Russian military.⁵³

Three: the plane's cargo. The DSB report states that the plane 'did not contain any dangerous goods' in spite of the 1,376 kilos of lithium ion batteries recorded in the bill of lading. Instead, the report goes on to state that '*a single lithium ion battery* was included on the cargo manifest. This item was declared as properly packaged and was therefore exempted from being classified as dangerous goods'. Unless there was another bill of lading than the one posted on the Malaysia Airlines website (later removed), this is not what the cargo manifest says. The DSB's obvious discomfort with the matter (did the batteries burn? Were they retrieved, and by whom?) is indicated by the added clarification that '*As such, this small item was not considered relevant to the investigation*'.⁵⁴ Others appear to have drawn different conclusions: two weeks after the downing of MH17, on 31 July, the US Department of Transportation issued new guidelines on the transport

of lithium ion batteries, focusing 'specifically on shipments by air'. Further tightening of regulations, both in the United States and by ICAO/IATA, followed.⁵⁵ The Dutch authorities were also well aware of military implications, for in 2015 The Hague refused an export licence for lithium ion batteries destined for the Indian army.⁵⁶

Meanwhile chairman Joustra speculated freely on the insurgents' responsibility in media interviews, implying that the presumed launch area eliminated other possible perpetrators. He implicated the Russians with even less to go on: 'How did that Buk battery get there ... where did it come from exactly? Who gave the order for it [to move]?'⁵⁷ Only when pressed to say more did he defer to the JIT investigation; after all, this was the remit of the criminal investigation, not his. Here the Ukrainian veto granted on 7 August proved more contentious and cracks between the contracted parties appeared midway – only to be buried again in the public progress report of September 2016.

Rehashing the Kiev account in the JIT investigation

In November 2014 an Australian coroners' report concluded that an examination of the victims' bodies revealed that they had died instantaneously from decompression. The bodies showed no signs of metal penetration from a Buk warhead or other ordnance on the left (port) side of the plane, which the Buk had allegedly hit. By contrast, the DSB report claims that the body of the on-duty captain seated on the left was riddled with metal fragments. However, it is impossible to verify this since his body did not undergo detailed examination and was cremated in the Netherlands for unknown reasons. The body of the co-pilot seated on the right, on the other hand, the one whose shirt 'looked like a sieve', was investigated and repatriated to Malaysia.⁵⁸ A Dutch pathologist who based an academic lecture on these anomalies was promptly fired from the national forensics team by the then-security and justice minister, Ard van der Steur, for disseminating information that was deemed 'speculative, untrue and *partly outside his area of expertise*'.⁵⁹ When the aforementioned coroners' report again became a matter of debate in December 2015 and the possibility of an air-to-air missile attack was raised, Australian police declared it 'a confidential document shared with JIT partners', whose publication could harm Australia's international relations.⁶⁰

In February 2016, the Dutch chief prosecutor on the JIT, Fred Westerbeke, told victims' relatives in a letter that no video or film footage of the missile launch was available, casting doubt on the Gerashchenko/Bellingcat photo of the white smoke trail. Westerbeke further claimed that US data passed on to Dutch military intelligence (MIVD) would not allow them to build a case against any perpetrators, since the radar data in the possession of the JIT did not point to a missile and neither did they rule out the presence of another plane. The letter was signed on behalf of the JIT, but on 22 February the Australian government dissociated itself from it.⁶¹ At that point, calls for including in the final JIT report a schedule of the evidence vetoed and the parties which vetoed each, no longer seemed ill-founded, certainly not after Westerbeke dismissed the Bellingcat claims regarding the names of the 53rd Buk regiment as unfit for evidence.⁶²

However, any hopes of a reliable report evaporated when an interim report to the Dutch next of kin in June 2016 revealed that the JIT investigation had for all practical purposes come under the supervision of the Ukrainian intelligence service, SBU.

Given that it had to be admitted that at least some of the tapped phone conversations (of a total of 3,500) which it supplied to the Dutch and Australian investigators in Kiev 'turn[ed] out to be fake', it was hard to believe reassurances that 'after intensive investigation ... [most of them] seem to be very sound, which contribute[s] to the mutual trust'.⁶³ The homey babble about the pleasant collaboration between colleagues sharing a 'love of police work' could hardly obscure glaring contradictions like the one referred to in [Chapter 4](#), that a month earlier, UN inspectors cut short their tour of SBU-controlled sites suspected of torture because they were denied access.⁶⁴

In September 2016, at its orally presented progress report (with supporting video animations, photos, etc.) in Nieuwegein near Utrecht in the Netherlands, the JIT followed the DSB by identifying the weapon as a missile from a 9M38 Buk, again failing to specify whether this was the newer version or the old one, which does not have bowtie shrapnel – although the JIT had bowtie-shaped particles swirling through a fictional sky in its video animation.⁶⁵ It also added the names of around 100 potential suspects, on the basis of video and photo evidence of various provenance and from telephone taps provided to it exclusively by the SBU. The transcripts were fitted into a narrative of insurgents 'ordering' a Buk from Russia, which after having fired its deadly missile, returned by a completely implausible, 120 kilometres long northern detour, via Debaltsevo and Lugansk, skirting the frontline; instead of crossing the nearby border southeast of Torez (20 km from the alleged launch site).⁶⁶ Several of the intercepted dialogues combined conversations which were not necessarily between the people supposedly on the phone at a given moment.⁶⁷

Finally, the JIT produced a new picture of the Buk smoke trail, now sideways, and against a clouded sky; a picture it claimed to have discovered on social media in the spring of 2016. However, the angle from which the photo is taken is exactly the same as another picture of the 15th of July 2014 by 'Andrey T.', aka '@parabellum_ua', of the pro-Kiev infowarrior network that also produced the Gerashchenko frontal picture.⁶⁸

On the eve of the JIT presentation the Russians again lifted the veil slightly by claiming that 'a forgotten hard disc' with Almaz-Antey primary radar data showed that no objects had passed through the airspace which the insurgent Buk would have had to cross, though they pointedly noted that the data did not permit any conclusions about what may have been in the air to the south and west of the plane. Almaz-Antey now argued that the impact pattern makes clear a hit would have resulted from a missile fired from west to east, which in combination with the radar data on the disc, would again inculpate Kiev.⁶⁹

A scorched-earth policy for Ukraine

It will be remembered that the civil war in July and early August 2014 was going very well for Kiev. The ring around Donetsk was closed and the two insurgent provinces were cut off from each other. By then, the Ukrainian regime had recaptured 23 of the original 36 insurgent-held districts.⁷⁰ However, on 24 August Russian special forces intervened to save the insurgents from being defeated and Donetsk from falling to the nationalist militias. The 3,000–4,000 Russian troops inflicted a massive defeat on Kiev's forces at Ilovaysk, 30 kilometres east of Donetsk. The nationalists suffered an estimated 1,000

casualties; Russian losses were at least one hundred, reported killed during 'exercises'.⁷¹ According to Phillip Karber in an e-mail to NATO Commander Breedlove, Kolomoisky's Dnipro I militia had borne the brunt of the fighting both at Ilovaysk and Donetsk airport. Bereza, the commander, had only just managed the battalion's escape from encirclement.⁷²

It is important to note here that the DigitalGlobe satellite images of a unit of self-propelled guns, which NATO made public to back its claims about a Russian incursion, were of a quality that makes clear Washington has the means to end all speculation on MH17 in one stroke.⁷³ Russian troops had been withdrawn again by the end of August, but not without delivering a clear message: Moscow would not allow the insurgents to be defeated militarily without a prior comprehensive deal of the sort whose negotiation had been interrupted by the downing of MH17. To keep the situation under control as far as the Russian leadership was concerned, the Donbass insurgents were now effectively placed under Russian command and no further socialist measures were tolerated.⁷⁴

Minsk and the deepening divide

Russia's message was heard and new negotiations began at Minsk at the initiative of the Belarussian president Alexander Lukashenko on 26 August. On 5 September 2014, in the presence of an OSCE representative, the Minsk Protocol was signed between Kiev (represented by Kuchma), Russia and representatives of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. It laid down 12 steps, of which an OSCE-monitored ceasefire, prisoner exchange, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, a return of federalism to the Donbass, elections, and control of the border were the most important.⁷⁵ Leaving little doubt about its intentions, the Wales NATO summit responded *on the same day* by announcing new steps towards greater military cooperation with Ukraine. These included joint exercises, the first of which would be held that month in the Lviv region ('Rapid Trident'). Yatsenyuk meanwhile stuck to the idea that NATO should back an all-out war with Russia to secure the Black Sea and restore control of Crimea and the Donbass.⁷⁶

Washington at this point appeared to be refocusing on the Middle East, or at least that was what NATO Commander Breedlove thought. In an e-mail to the former secretary of state, General Colin Powell, he complained that the Obama administration was paying too much attention to the 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria. 'I may be wrong ... but I do not see this [White House] really "engaged" by working with Europe/NATO', he wrote. 'Frankly I think we are a "worry," ... a threat to get the nation [dragged] into a conflict'.⁷⁷ To Wesley Clark he lamented that one allied intelligence service (the German BND) was stubbornly contesting NATO alarmism concerning Russian intentions in Ukraine.⁷⁸

To bridge the dangerous gap between coup politicians and nationalist militias that had been exposed in August, Yatsenyuk, Parubiy, Avakov, Turchynov and others founded a new party, the People's Front, in the run-up to the October elections. Its programme not only flatly contradicted the Minsk provisions; its 'military council' included the fascist Azov commander, Biletskiy, and his counterpart of the Aidar Battalion, Ihor Lapin.⁷⁹ The Front narrowly emerged as the largest bloc with 22 per cent (on a record low turnout of 52.4 per cent), followed by the Poroshenko-Klitschko bloc.⁸⁰ That Svoboda and Right

Sector did badly mattered little, although it was much cited in the West as a sign of normalisation. But then, why ensure the bad press explicitly fascist parties would bring when you no longer need them to achieve their purposes? Biletskiy campaigned alongside Yatsenyuk in October; in December, Turchynov was made secretary of the NSDC. Parubiy was elected first deputy speaker of the Kiev parliament (he became speaker in April 2016), all on the People's Front ticket.

In December 2014, the new parliament decided, against Poroshenko's advice, to abandon the country's constitutionally anchored neutral status and strive for NATO and EU membership (the outgoing parliament had already ratified the EU Association Agreement in mid September).⁸¹ Kiev was now being administered as a Western protectorate, with US Ambassador Pyatt meeting Poroshenko every fortnight to discuss policy and personnel issues. However, even this was not enough for Kiev's peace of mind. Wesley Clark reported in November that the regime felt it had been 'totally overpowered at Minsk'. 'They want US help with negotiations. *No more Minsk, keep dialogue in Geneva with strong US participation*'.⁸²

In early January 2015, the insurgency broke the Minsk truce by launching a military offensive to recover the territorial losses incurred from May to August 2014. On the 21st, rebels captured Donetsk International Airport, or what was left of it, and began to push for Debaltsevo. When it appeared that large Ukrainian forces were about to be encircled in the Debaltsevo pocket and might even be destroyed altogether, with both Russia and the United States threatening to become more deeply involved, German Chancellor Merkel and French President François Hollande put forward a new peace plan on 7 February.⁸³ 'Minsk II', announced on the 12th, repeated the provisions of Minsk I, this time underwritten also by Germany and France. Yet, as Nicolai Petro noted at the time, there was one major omission from the agreement – an end to the Anti-Terrorist Operation against the east. That would not have passed the Kiev parliament; Yatsenyuk, Avakov, Parubiy and NSDC Secretary Turchynov were its most active supporters.⁸⁴ Even so, to cite Petro again, 'despite all its flaws, the Minsk Accords recognize [a] basic liberal truth by calling for the diversity of religions, languages and cultures within Ukraine to be enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution'.⁸⁵ But who would respond to that call?

Even before the Minsk II agreement, the NATO war party reaffirmed the philosophy outlined by Wesley Clark at the outset of the civil war: the need to make Ukraine a pawn in the global contest with Russia and China. 'Obama or Kerry needs to be convinced that Putin must be confronted', the Atlantic Council stalwart, Harlan Ullman, wrote in February, before the Minsk negotiations had begun.⁸⁶ On the 16th, Karber reported that Pakistan and Poland were willing to supply anti-tank missiles and surplus tanks to Kiev if Washington gave the OK. In March, Wesley Clark in an e-mail exchange with Karber, Breedlove and Rose Gottemoeller (undersecretary for arms control at the State Department, on her way to become deputy secretary-general of NATO later in 2015) complained again about the lack of bellicosity in Washington.⁸⁷ And indeed, Western military presence in Ukraine was largely symbolic: in April 2015, 300 US paratroops of 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in Ukraine, reinforcing the 75 already deployed British troops. They were followed by 200 Canadians and 50 Polish instructors.⁸⁸

In Ukraine, new anti-Russian legislation, restricting the availability of Russian media; a purge of academics accused of 'separatism'; measures aimed at glorifying the wartime

OUN and UPA; and an unrelenting demonisation of Putin, steadily brought the population round to the war party's perspective. By August 2015, only a minority still characterised the conflict in the east as a civil war.⁸⁹ The growing dehumanisation of the Donbass population, with widespread talk of exterminating the *Koloradi* (the Colorado potato beetle, orange and black like the Russian anti-Nazi ribbon) struck deep roots. In this climate a series of assassinations of federalist politicians occurred, reported even by CNN. Several victims had been announced on the much-feared *Peacemaker* list of 'traitors'; most left 'suicide notes'. The journalist, Oles Buzyna, who pleaded for reconciliation, was shot dead from a car.⁹⁰

Ensuring that the Donbass would *never* become a factor in Ukrainian politics again was critical to the Kiev regime's survival. As Gerashchenko pointed out in a statement in September 2015, relaxing the ethnic cleansing *would allow federalism to raise its head again* (so much for the 'Russian invasion'). Even secession was preferable to Kiev to such federalism and, understandably, Moscow opposed secession for the same reason: without federalism, any remaining regional minorities in Ukraine would have no protection. De-industrialisation and the intentional flooding of mines reduced the need for the region's workers and a commentator on the popular Hromadske TV did not bother to hide the exterminist intent, stating that the Donbass is 'severely overpopulated with people nobody has any use for': of four million inhabitants of Donetsk oblast alone, 'at least 1.5 million are superfluous', and since the region 'must be exploited as a resource, which it is ... the most important thing ... no matter how cruel it may sound—is that there is a certain category of people that must be exterminated'.⁹¹

In early 2016, the civil war had killed more than 13,000 people, the majority as a result of indiscriminate shelling and bombardment of civilian targets by Kiev forces. Some estimates are much higher because, with the breakdown of civil administration in the east and the consequently irregular funerals of both Donbass fighters and citizens likely resulted in many deaths not being counted. Nationalist militia members were not recognised by Kiev as entitled to official funerals and were unlikely to have been added to the death count. Around one million people fled to Russia, 160,000 to Belarus, and 1.6 million are internally displaced.⁹² Yet Ukrainian ultra-nationalism and fascism are not blind forces spreading violence at random: they serve particular interests. Their deployment in Ukraine benefits the oligarchy, as well as the larger geo-economic strategy by which the West intends to decouple Ukraine from Russia, de-industrialise it, and thus weaken the forces ranged against the liberal West by turning the country into an advance post for NATO.⁹³

The energy gamble and the cost of sanctions

The economic warfare against Russia marks the end of the era following the collapse of the Soviet Union when the elder Bush proclaimed the triumph of 'free markets'.⁹⁴ It will be recalled that new US sanctions were imposed the day before MH17 went down. Four key companies in the energy field, Novatek, Gazprombank, Vnesheconombank and Rosneft, were barred from US capital markets for transactions lasting longer than 90 days, whilst eight weapons manufacturers were also placed under a sanctions regime.⁹⁵ The EU, originally hesitant to follow suit, fell in line after the downing of MH17, although no

Russian guilt or complicity had been established and even though its trade with Russia was roughly ten times as large as the United States'.⁹⁶ Amidst record capital flight from Russia (\$151 billion in 2014 alone) and a collapse of foreign investment, Moscow struck back by suspending food imports from the EU and NATO countries, further raising the stakes.

The interruption of Russian gas supplies to Europe was a key objective of the Ukrainian coup regime and its NATO backers. In mid-June 2014 a pipeline was blown up by Ukrainian ultras in Poltava oblast. Later that same month, the Dolynsky Oil refinery in Kirovograd was seized by Right Sector militants.⁹⁷ Right after the downing of MH17, on the 18th, the mothballed Rosneft Linik refinery at Lysychansk, located near the frontline in Lugansk, was set on fire by shelling.⁹⁸ South Stream, too, landed in the firing line. A complaint to the World Trade Organization by Russia in late July did not reverse NATO and EU policy of trying to block the project, which the downing of MH17 had effectively killed already.⁹⁹ As Russian banks financing South Stream, led by Gazprombank, were hit by sanctions, the necessary capital could no longer be raised.¹⁰⁰ Putin earlier had hinted at moving the transit of gas to Europe to non-European countries; in August, it was reported there was a Plan B in the works to export via Turkey.¹⁰¹ On 1 December 2014, during a state visit to Ankara, the Russian president announced that in light of Western sanctions and the refusal of construction permits in the EU, South Stream would be replaced by a 'Turkish Stream' pipeline, besides the existing Blue Stream link.

Turkey is not bound by EU competition rules and the EU will need Russian gas. However, in November 2015, a Turkish F-16 from İncirlik airbase shot down a Russian fighter jet over northern Syria, throwing relations between Moscow and Ankara into a deep crisis and entailing the cancellation of Turkish Stream. This was only overcome after the July 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan, in which Russia sided with the Turkish president, possibly even warned him in advance. Since the F-16 that shot down the Russian jet belonged to a unit at İncirlik that took part in the coup attempt provoked by Erdoğan's rapprochement with Moscow, it is not impossible that the incident may have been part of the larger US and Western strategy to throw relations with Russia into disarray, in which MH17 also became mired.¹⁰²

In the meantime, year on year gas exports from Russia to the EU, Turkey and the Commonwealth of Independent States had fallen by 10 per cent over 2014 already. Gazprom's revenue from sales abroad dropped by 16 per cent, as the EU for the fourth year in succession succeeded in lowering its imports from Russia, although the volume of Gazprom's share in the EU market remained stable at 30 per cent.¹⁰³ The main clients are Germany (almost one-third of deliveries), Italy and non-EU Turkey (around 20 per cent each).¹⁰⁴ Ukraine of course was key in the decline of Gazprom's foreign sales, with the Kiev regime intent on ceasing all imports from Russia and replacing them by domestic (shale) gas production and imports of Russian gas from Slovakia and other countries – using IMF and EU money to pay the mark-up. Gazprom, on the other hand, was biding its time. After the contract with Ukraine's Naftogaz expires in 2018, the EU will need to procure gas from somewhere.¹⁰⁵

The next step in the economic warfare programme was the strategic lowering of the oil price to hit Russia directly. Obviously this had a contradictory effect on US shale

gas and LNG export prospects too. As argued in a World Economic Forum report of January 2015, 'the US and EU in recent months have come up with new forms of sanctions (e.g. the Treasury Department's Sectoral Sanctions Identifications or "SSI" list)'. The authors claim sanctions are considered 'as the drones of the future—highly targeted weapons that can be deployed to devastating effect'.¹⁰⁶ Oil prices dropped from \$115 a barrel in June 2014 to around \$60 by December, although the excess of supply over demand was small.¹⁰⁷ One explanation is manipulation of oil prices by Wall Street banks, whose methods did not stop at holding physical oil, as was revealed to a US Senate hearing in July 2013. In a subsequent Senate report focusing on Morgan Stanley, it was noted that this bank alone had 'operating leases on over 100 oil storage tank fields with 58 million barrels of storage capacity globally'.¹⁰⁸ Playing energy futures markets thus was backed up by banks' own reserves.

Since the oil price collapse was not remotely proportional to the supply and demand situation, the banks obviously had moved into the geopolitical domain in line with US foreign policy. Why they and other large business would do this is what Karan Bhatia and Dmitri Trenin call the process of 'de-globalization'. This means that 'companies are increasingly forced to think of themselves as tied to their home governments'.¹⁰⁹ After the US government defined Russia and the contender bloc it is part of, as the enemy, the banks, too, have aligned themselves on this policy. Surveillance by the 'Five Eyes' (NSA, GCHQ, etc.) specifically targets BRICS embassies and companies such as Gazprom or Aeroflot, or Brazil's Petrobras (Canada's CSEC targets the Brazilian ministry of mines and energy); China figures less prominently in the Snowden revelations.¹¹⁰ As Eric Draitser concludes:

Russia is the target of a multi-faceted, asymmetric campaign of destabilization that has employed economic, political, and psychological forms of warfare, each of which has been specifically designed to inflict maximum damage on the Kremlin. While the results of this multi-pronged assault have been mixed, and their ultimate effect being the subject of much debate, *Moscow is, without a doubt, ground zero in a global assault against the BRICS nations.*¹¹¹

No wonder the Russian rouble lost about 50 per cent of its value vis-à-vis the major currencies in the second half of 2014.¹¹² The EU, too, paid a heavy price for its Atlantic loyalty. Of the overall costs of Western sanctions and Russian countermeasures to mid-2015 of around \$60 billion, 76.7 per cent was incurred by EU countries, with Poland, Lithuania, Germany and the Netherlands hit hardest.¹¹³

At this point, the fragility of the Eurasian alternative revealed itself when Russia's closest partners, Belarus and Kazakhstan, declined to join the retaliatory Russian import ban. The ensuing trade frictions to prevent disguised EU food imports entering Russia highlight the extent to which the contender posture is an involuntary response to Western forward pressure. Neither do the BRICS offer the prospect of a replacement market any time soon. To China, Russia only exports 10 per cent of the total, one-fifth of its trade with the EU.¹¹⁴ Politically, on the other hand, China let it be known in September 2014 that it would never join a sanctions regime and would continue to work as a partner with Russia to ward off the effects of Western economic warfare.¹¹⁵

For Russia, financing the budget through internationally traded bonds was made practically impossible, whilst equipment for oil and gas exploitation as well as defence and dual-use goods could no longer be imported.¹¹⁶ True, a Russian payments suspension or default is not likely: its sovereign debt is between 3 and 6 per cent of GDP depending on the mode of calculation, and the state has several hundred billions in foreign currency and gold in its Reserve Fund. However, by late 2014 Russian corporations were indebted to the tune of \$614 billion, and, excluded from European refinancing, these firms now were making demands on the National Welfare Fund (meant to back up pensions).¹¹⁷ Sberbank (third largest in Europe), VTB Bank, Gazprombank, Vnesheconombank and Rosselkhozbank were unable fill the gap, as they were targeted themselves. The risks are once again for Europe, in this case, French and Italian banks, which were holding \$44 and \$27 billion of Russian debt, respectively, by far the greatest share of the total.¹¹⁸

In November 2014, Chancellor Merkel declared that Germany was ready for EU–Eurasian Union trade talks, ‘if progress could be made in eastern Ukraine’ – had she only made that offer earlier!¹¹⁹ However, the incompatibilities between the neoliberal EU and the oligarchic, state-directed capitalism of the Eurasian Union are structural, as are those between the EU and ‘crony capitalist’ Ukraine.¹²⁰ Any reconstitution of Ukraine as a functioning society and economy is therefore dependent on cooperation with Russia. Through transfer pricing and other practices inherited from Soviet times, honouring existing supply agreements, or otherwise, Moscow effectively continues to keep the Ukrainian economy going, to a degree the crumbling EU is in no position to replace.¹²¹

Removing Ukraine from Russia’s defence-industrial base

Ukraine’s GDP per capita collapsed from \$4,185.48 in 2013, to \$2,924.98 in 2014, went further down to \$2,004.92 in 2015 and was expected to hit \$1,850 in 2016.¹²² Some of the key components of the former Soviet military-industrial complex, which were so advanced because they had to keep up with competition with the West, were in Ukraine. Disrupting this particular product chain is therefore more than proportionally damaging to its economy, and of course to Russia’s as well. In 2012, Russia was still the most important export market for Ukraine’s top-bracket industrial products, for which the EU has no appetite.¹²³ The free trade provisions attached to the EU Association Agreement will cut the Ukrainian defence-industrial base from Russia. The defence provisions in the Agreement (articles 4, 7 and 10) have turned the EU into an extension of NATO.¹²⁴ By gaining access both to Ukrainian military equipment and arms-industrial product specifications Western defence industries and NATO military will also get a good look at various aspects of Russia’s existing military capabilities.¹²⁵

Essentially, Ukraine had inherited an overblown defence industry that forced it to find clients in third countries after 1991. With large inventories of cheap but reliable tanks and other military hardware, Ukraine competed with Russian arms exporters in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.¹²⁶ However, complementarities inherited from the Soviet era outweighed this rivalry because they helped Ukraine achieve economies of scale in defence production for export and Russia to have access to indispensable parts and components for the systems it exported. As Putin put it later, ‘we have 245 Ukrainian enterprises working for us in the defence industry alone’.¹²⁷ Whilst direct

sanctions imposed by Washington certainly took aim at Moscow's military capabilities, bringing Kiev into the Western camp offered further chances to disrupt Russia's defence-industrial base. The coup government was in fact willing to destroy large swaths of the most technologically advanced Ukrainian industry for that goal.

The Antonov concern is a case in point. Antonov, set up in 1946 as a Soviet aerospace research institution, was relocated to Kiev in 1952. After independence, the company, using Russian parts and assembling a series of different plane types including the largest transport plane in the world (the An-225), began to look for new markets. In 1997, the presidents of Ukraine and Russia, Kuchma and Yeltsin, proposed in a letter to Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand to turn the An-70, then near the production stage, into a pan-European heavy transport plane and produce it together. The plane was tested for three months by German aerospace engineers, but eventually the newly founded Franco-German aerospace giant, EADS, prevailed on the German defence minister to shut out Antonov from the European market and build an Airbus A400M instead. When European NATO allies needed transport planes for their contribution in Afghanistan in 2001 and the Airbus was not yet available, six An-124s were leased to avoid having to purchase American C-17s, four to five times as expensive. The episode proved the Antonovs' worth, but NATO geopolitical strategy and aerospace company interests prevailed.¹²⁸ So Antonov turned to Russia again and a joint Russian–Ukrainian enterprise, UAC-Antonov LLC, was agreed in October 2010.

After the seizure of power and the installation of an anti-Russian government, Kiev assigned Antonov's three divisions to the state holding Ukroboronprom in the spring of 2015 and in July replaced the firm's management. According to a resolution of the Yatsenyuk II government of 8 September 2015, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, then still under the Lithuanian investment banker, A. Abromavičius, instructed the concern to exit the joint venture with UAC. The severance of its ties with Russia led to the scrapping of a Russian order for a new transport plane, entailing losses in the order of several billions of dollars. In January 2016, the pride of the Soviet aircraft industry was liquidated and absorbed into Ukroboronprom entirely, amidst corruption accusations involving Yatsenyuk personally and vague promises of new, but unspecified orders from Saudi Arabia and other, anonymous clients.¹²⁹ The possibility that China might step in and invest in reviving the giant An-225, of which one remains half-built due to the rupture with Russia, is complicated by the fact that the plane's construction involves eight major plants: four in Russia, three in Ukraine and one in Uzbekistan.¹³⁰

The story of other Ukrainian defence companies may be different in their details, but the overall tendency is the same. As late as June 2014, there were still more than 50 large Ukrainian companies producing defence-related goods for Russia, with research and manufacturing centres in Kharkov (e.g. the famous tank factories) and Mykolaiv (Nikolaev), where Zorya-Mashproekt produces gas turbine engines for almost the entire Russian navy. Of the 54 planned new Russian warships, 32 would have had an engine manufactured by Zorya-Mashproekt. S-300 ground-to-air missiles, produced by Almaz-Antey, use Lorta electronics from Lviv.¹³¹ Engines for planes such as the Russian fighter jet Yak 160 and the Mi-8 attack helicopters are made in Zaporozhe by Motor-Sich, a company that supplies about 80 per cent of its output to the Russian Federation. Motor-Sich is so dependent on the Russian market that it was ordered to avoid joint

ventures with BMW-Rolls Royce in spite of negotiations. Its workers also resisted cutting off trade with Russia and a brain drain of engineers might follow were it forced to do so. Without Motor-Sich engines, it will be practically impossible to realise Moscow's plan to add 1,000 attack helicopters to its arsenal; Russian Rostec is only able to produce 50 helicopter engines per year, seven times as many are needed.¹³² Yet, Motor-Sich went its own way when it concluded a new joint venture with Russia in September 2014, whilst its airline opened a new link with Moscow in December. This independence is made possible by the fact that Motor-Sich is one of the few non-state-owned defence companies in Ukraine; it is part-owned by Vyacheslav Bohuslayev (a Party of Regions MP under Yanukovich) and perhaps also protected from economic self-destruction by foreign investment (Bank of New York Mellon and others).¹³³

Even Kuchma's old fief, Yuzhmash in Dnepropetrovsk, which produced the Russian intercontinental missile arsenal, got in trouble. One of the tasks of Kolomoisky's Dnipro I militia was providing security for Yuzhmash. Commander Bereza, as related by his friend and US adviser Phillip Karber, attempted to shift to smaller missile production with Western help. In fact, in the very month Karber reported this to Breedlove (incidentally revealing NATO's direct involvement), the firm, according to Wikipedia, imposed a two-month unpaid vacation on its workers, because with the loss of Russian business, bankruptcy was looming. The last space product had been delivered in early 2014, around the time of the *coup d'état*, and the company's income that year would dwindle to a quarter of what it earned in 2011. By October 2015, workers were no longer being paid.¹³⁴

Attempts by Russia to establish compensatory production facilities such as the Sevmach naval yards at Severodvinsk, which replace the Nosenko yards at Mykolaiv in Ukraine, are in progress. Much of the spare part and component production previously covered from Ukraine has been offered to Belarus. But the lowering of the Russian defence budget for 2016 by 5 per cent or more, and recurrent corruption, is forcing Moscow to restructure entire production lines away from the oligarchy and back into state ownership, as in the case of the transfer of space exploration to Roskosmos.¹³⁵

Ukraine's decline from industry to extraction

From a Western perspective, the destruction of eastern Ukrainian industry was a fringe benefit of the military campaign. The transformation of an entire economy can only be partial and incomplete, but the EU Association Agreement and the DCFTA leave no doubt as to Western intentions. If the EU still resisted the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which with Trump at the helm, will probably not be introduced anyway, Ukraine in fact signed up to both Atlantic and European neo-liberalism when it surrendered its land to agribusiness reliant on GM crops, antibiotics-based animal husbandry and unconventional resource exploitation such as shale gas.¹³⁶ The transformation of the Ukrainian economy has been proceeding along two main lines: agribusiness and shale gas production.

The agribusiness sector is still largely controlled by Ukrainian oligarchs, who retain control of 82 per cent of the top hundred holdings.¹³⁷ Ancillary operations of Soviet-era enterprises, such as the Ilyich Steel and Iron Works, which owned 200,000 hectares of arable land, large herds of cattle and pig farms, passed into the hands of Akhmetov and

Vadym Novinsky, one of his business partners, to be transformed into HarvEast Group. Not to be outdone, Kolomoisky established Privat-AgroHolding in 2005 and soon controlled 24 firms leasing a total of 150,000 hectares of land.¹³⁸ The biggest agribusiness oligarch is Oleh Bakhmatyuk, who in 2011 merged his two companies, Avangard (eggs and poultry) and UkrLandFarming, into one (domiciled in Cyprus). UkrLandFarming leases the largest area of arable land in Ukraine (over 530,000 hectares), besides breeding pigs and cattle.¹³⁹ In late 2013 it announced the shipment of huge volumes of corn to China, expecting to raise it to two million tons per year by 2018. In January 2014, six weeks before the seizure of power in Kiev, US agribusiness giant Cargill was brought on board with a 5 per cent share in UkrLandFarming, to better equip it for supplying the Chinese market.¹⁴⁰

If Bakhmatyuk was looking east, with Cargill joining up, other agribusiness figures in Ukraine betted on the EU. Andriy Verevskiy, a member of Yanukovych's inner circle and owner of the Kernel Group, gained control of the largest producer of sunflower oil and a port for exporting it by buying Black Sea Industries. In addition the Kernel Group is the largest holding company involved in the trade and export of grain.¹⁴¹ Likewise, Yuri Kosyuk, whose Mironivsky Hliboprodukt (MHP) slaughters 330 million chickens every year, was eyeing the European market. The Dutch may have rejected the EU Association Agreement in a referendum, but in May 2016 Kosyuk, who in Poroshenko's presidential administration was responsible for the civil war (he had to step down on corruption charges in late 2014),¹⁴² announced a huge investment in the Netherlands, selling poultry produced in substandard conditions for use in food-industrial 'poultry products'.¹⁴³

In a September 2013 preparatory note for a meeting of Dutch Foreign Secretary Timmermans with Yanukovych's prime minister, Azarov, the strategic aims of EU association were clearly spelled out. Target sectors were the energy, agricultural and food processing sectors, as well as services.¹⁴⁴ As part of the opening of the economy required by Brussels, Ukraine already had leased out more than one-third of its agricultural land, two-thirds of it to US agribusiness, by early 2013. It is the only European country to have alienated land to this degree, comparable to certain Third World countries.¹⁴⁵ The largest foreign agro-holdings are NCH Capital of the United States (400,000 ha), Ukrainian Agrarian Investments (Russian, 260,000 ha), Agrogénération (French) and Toepfer (Germany), as well as pension funds from Sweden and the Netherlands. Crop exports are destined mainly for the Middle East, North Africa, the EU and Turkey.¹⁴⁶ Cargill owns at least four grain elevators and two sunflower seed processing plants in Ukraine. Monsanto, too, has had a presence in Ukraine since 1992, doubling its staff in 2012; after the downfall of Yanukovych, it stepped up its involvement, *inter alia* by investing in a new seed plant in March 2015. Du Pont already announced the building of a new seed plant in June 2013.¹⁴⁷

By 2013–14, with the Maidan revolt overtly supported by the West, corporations were betting on regime change improving their conditions of entry. Sunflower is a key driver of large-scale export crops in Ukraine (and in the Russian Federation), usually on very large plots. Initially the EU encouraged sunflower cultivation through the TACIS transition programme, but it found that Ukrainian firms trading and processing sunflower oil were connected to organised crime.¹⁴⁸ Under the EU Association Agreement, however, changes to regulation relating to taxes, import and export laws, and land

sales were all on the agenda, as was genetic modification.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, ensuring access for transnational agribusiness and for GM crops was key to the 'economic regime change' envisaged by the market democracy project. The IMF had GM access as one of its conditions for loans and the EU Association Agreement too includes a clause (Article 404) encouraging the use of such crops even if the EU itself is hesitant. GM allows crops to be aggressively sprayed with pesticides they have been genetically modified to tolerate, with huge damage to all other life. In a speech for the US-Ukraine Conference in December 2013, Jesus Madrazo, Monsanto's vice-president of corporate engagement, stated that 'we ... hope that at some point biotechnology is a tool that will be available to Ukrainian farmers in the future'.¹⁵⁰

After the seizure of power in February, the process accelerated. The California-based Oakland Institute revealed in July 2014 the extent to which the IMF, the EBRD and the EU were working together to exploit the crisis in Ukraine to force through deregulation and liberalisation of the country's agriculture and facilitate foreign investment. In December, the UK minister for Europe spoke of the 'marvellous investment opportunities for the agricultural and food processing sector, for retailing and for energy investment'.¹⁵¹ Ukraine is already the third-largest exporter of corn and fifth largest exporter of wheat in the world. In spite of a moratorium on the sale of land, decreed in 2001 and extended to January 2016, there are two ways in which foreign capital acquires control nevertheless: by long-term leases combined with investment in seed and food processing industry, and by participation in Ukrainian agribusiness.¹⁵² Because export monocultures tend to exhaust the soil and displace subsistence crops, the population suffers from what the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, calls a new form of colonialism.¹⁵³

The second main axis of the transformation of the Ukrainian economy in the wake of de-industrialisation is gas, notably, shale gas. In 2007, the US energy company, Vanco, was granted a concession by Yanukovich, then prime minister, to extract gas in the Sea of Azov, but it was scrapped by Yuliya Tymoshenko upon her return to office. Chapter 3 already mentioned ExxonMobil's February 2011 agreement with Russia's Rosneft to develop the Sea of Azov reserves, and Shell's Yuzivska shale gas deal in May 2012.¹⁵⁴ Other major players for large-scale shale gas exploitation include Chevron, which signed a deal for exploiting the Donbass energy resources in 2013.¹⁵⁵

That Exxon's former CEO, Rex Tillerson, was made secretary of state in the Trump presidency, may or may not revive the planned exploitation of the Sea of Azov reserves. Other planned investments require the recapture of Crimea and the Donbass. This holds, notably, for Kolomoisky's Cyprus-based gas company, Burisma, referred to in Chapter 2. Kolomoisky's support for the nationalist paramilitary battalions and other instances of his anti-Russian militancy in the civil war find their obvious rationale here. Burisma holds permits to exploit the Donbass as well as explore the Azov-Kuban Basin east of Crimea; Kolomoisky ensured key American backing by having Devon Archer, who had been an adviser to John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004, appointed to the Burisma board.¹⁵⁶ Soon after, Vice-President Joe Biden's son Hunter also got a seat, whilst another US citizen, Alan Apter, is the chairman. Aleksander Kwasniewski, former president of Poland, is on the Burisma board, too; he has close links to Pinchuk and is a regular at the latter's annual Yalta European Strategy (YES) meetings. Kwasniewski's

foundation, Amicus Europae, and the foundation of Prince Albert II of Monaco founded the international forum on 'Energy Security for the Future', which claims to be Europe's largest in this domain, jointly with Burisma.¹⁵⁷ Besides shale gas, it appears that Burisma is also eyeing diamond deposits in the Mariupol region.¹⁵⁸

As the Dutch investigative journalist, Arno Wellens, documents, the former Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt, is connected, through his various corporate directorships, to interests directly involved in Ukrainian energy ventures. Verhofstadt's vehement encouragement of the Maidan protesters in 2014 would have been remarkable in itself, and as mentioned earlier, he brought Bellingcat's Elliot Higgins to the European Parliament to report on Russian misdeeds; in addition, his board memberships include the company with the world's largest liquid natural gas (LNG) fleet, Exmar, a candidate to ship liquefied shale gas from eastern Ukraine, in which other Belgian companies such as Tractebel have shown an interest too.¹⁵⁹

Prism of disaster

This book takes the downing of Flight MH17 as a prism through which a range of different strands – geopolitical, geo-economic, military strategic – are refracted. Before concluding, let me briefly review what happened to the Krasner/Pascual 'market democracy' contract that also was a key driver in Western strategy for Ukraine, besides the geopolitical posture against Russia and China as the main bulwarks of the Eurasian/BRICS/SCO contender bloc. The EU Association Agreement with the DCFTA is such a contract; the privatisation of 'state-owned enterprises holding in place a nonviable economy' is at the heart of its implementation. With the coup government in Kiev confirmed by elections in October 2014 ('democracy'), the stage was therefore set for an assault on the state-owned Naftogaz Ukrainiy. What followed was the single most concerted attempt to introduce a neoliberal economy in Ukraine, disempower key oligarchs and reform the country's crony capitalism – and it failed.

'Market democracy' in practice

The formation of a new Yatsenyuk government in December 2014 set in motion changes that triggered a fight amongst different fractions in the oligarchy over control of the levers of state power and the economy. In November, George Soros published a long editorial, 'Wake up Europe', in which he outlined a neoliberal future for Ukraine. Calling Naftogaz Ukrainiy a black hole in the country's budget that should be tackled urgently, Soros framed the necessary changes as part of what he defined as Europe's 'indirect war with Russia'. Indeed, he even suggested sacrificing austerity in order to fund an increase in defence expenditure, a proposal that resonated across the EU.¹⁶⁰ South Stream and comparable energy links, and, more generally, EU–Russia economic interdependence based on gas, are the main targets in this war; wresting the Ukrainian gas network from the hands of the oligarchy and bringing it under Western control would be key in preventing Ukraine from reverting again into economic interdependence with Russia, should normal relations be restored.¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, the EU has been generous with rhetoric but not with money, confining its actual payments to Kiev to relatively small sums and leaving Ukraine to rely on the IMF, which in January 2015 announced a new bailout package for Ukraine. This was to be an extended-fund facility, allowing the IMF to lend more money over a longer period.¹⁶² The required shock therapy led Yatsenyuk to assemble a cabinet of outsiders; crucially, US citizen Natalie Jaresko of the Kiev-based Horizon Capital investment fund, as finance minister. Jaresko's expertise in Ukrainian privatisation dated from her time as economic councillor at the American embassy. Her role complemented that of the new minister of agriculture and food, Aleksei Pavelko, entrusted with the privatisation of agricultural land.¹⁶³ The aforementioned Aivaras Abromavičius, a Lithuanian investment banker at East Capital, another fund specialising in assets on the perimeter of the EU, was made minister of economic development and trade. Because the constitution forbids dual nationality, Jaresko, Abromavičius and a third foreigner, Aleksandr Kvitashvili, who had privatised health care in his native Georgia, were given Ukrainian nationality with a two-year grace period to arrange a transition. In the same decree, Poroshenko also gave Ukrainian citizenship to several foreigners fighting against the Donbass insurgency.¹⁶⁴

Soros' recommendations concerning the oil and gas monopoly were initially followed to the letter; when Poroshenko fired Kolomoisky as governor of Dnepropetrovsk in March 2015. Until then, Kolomoisky effectively controlled Naftogaz subsidiaries Ukrnafta and Ukrtransnafta and siphoned off profits, although Naftogaz held the majority stake. However, Kolomoisky's 42 per cent was backed up by a monopoly of oil refining (the one functioning Ukrainian oil refinery in Kremenchuk) and by his lease of oil storage facilities to the state.¹⁶⁵ The second reason why Poroshenko moved against Kolomoisky was concern over the governor's reliance on the extremist militias he financed for 'unfriendly takeovers'. Indeed, the day before he was dismissed, the oligarch-governor had tried to recapture Ukrnafta by force – not the first time he used armed thugs to accelerate the merger and acquisition process. Poroshenko told Kolomoisky on the latter's dismissal that there would no longer be 'pocket armies', although the accompanying order of the SBU and the interior ministry to disarm the militias was not enforced.¹⁶⁶

Certainly, Interior Minister Avakov initiated investigations into former Svoboda ministers Shvayka (agriculture) and Mokhnyk (ecology) and a host of other, lesser functionaries. This was primarily to ensure that a new instalment of IMF money was paid out. Ukraine was also granted a 20 per cent 'haircut' of its external debt, amounting to savings of \$3 billion – a gift to a non-member state that contrasts painfully to the merciless treatment of EU member Greece. Ukraine's military expenditure almost doubled compared to 2013, haemorrhaging a state budget already indebted to the tune of 95 per cent of GDP.¹⁶⁷

In July 2015, the head of the SBU, Nalivaychenko, was dismissed following consultations with Ambassador Pyatt. By now, the hugely unpopular, hardline neoliberal and pro-American forces were beginning to face opposition from the marginalised Donbass oligarchs seeking to recapture positions lost in the coup of 2014. Firtash, who on 30 April 2015 heard an Austrian judge throw out the US extradition demand, had been quietly building an alternative coalition. He was head of the Employers' Federation of Ukraine and, working with the country's trade union federation, he created a new bloc composed of German, Russian and Ukrainian capitalists assembled under the banner of

the Agency for the Modernisation of Ukraine. As before, when he was working on the gas portfolio in the negotiations between Merkel and Putin interrupted by the downing of MH17, Firtash posed as the champion of peace and no doubt was best-placed for such a role among the oligarchs.¹⁶⁸

Poroshenko, meanwhile, succeeded in exploiting his presidency to the full. An up-and-coming oligarch when Firtash selected him for office in March 2014, according to the Polish OSW (Eastern Studies Centre) in 2015, Poroshenko had risen to the premier league, notably through his new holding, International Investment Bank, which alone increased its assets by 85 per cent. According to Nicolai Petro, Poroshenko's personal wealth increased seven-fold over 2015.¹⁶⁹

In September, Soros wrote a letter to Yatsenyuk complimenting the government for its pro-market policies regarding Naftogaz. However, he warned that if people were to be forced to pay market rates they might come out into the streets again.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, in October, continuing revelations of fraud by the government were driving the popularity of the People's Front ever lower; and in early November 2015, Soros himself arrived in Kiev to discuss the situation. His schedule was hacked by CyberBerkut, providing insight into the predatory neoliberal bloc ensconced in Kiev – temporarily as it would turn out. Following dinner with Jaresko, Soros met Poroshenko. He warned the president that Ukraine might become a new Bosnia as a result of the Minsk II agreement – in other words, no return to federalism, no rights for any remaining 'Serbians'! T. Fiala, the Czech head of Dragon Capital (the largest investment fund operating in Ukraine), also attended the Soros meeting with Poroshenko. Ukraine's banking authorities were advised by the auspicious visitor to stabilise the sub-prime housing credit programme, which, with almost 60 per cent of bank loans in foreign currency, had spiralled out of control in the crisis of 2008. A law to that effect was drafted within a month after Soros' visit.¹⁷¹

Meetings with Ambassador Pyatt, oligarchs Pinchuk and Taruta, as well as Soros' long-standing friend, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (appointed governor of Odessa in May 2015 and heading Poroshenko's International Consulting Council for Reforms) and economy minister Abromavičius completed the Soros tour.¹⁷²

In the months that followed, however, popular confidence in the Yatsenyuk government collapsed to below 10 per cent. In February 2016, Abromavičius solved the double nationality issue by resigning over the continuing grip of Ukrainian oligarchs on Naftogaz and the defence industry. Igor Kononenko, deputy head of the 'Bloc of Petro Poroshenko' parliamentary faction, who controls the nominally state-owned Centreneuro, was singled out as the main culprit in the machinations surrounding Naftogaz.¹⁷³ Clearly, in Ukraine, too, crony capitalism, or what the Chatham House report calls 'the quasi-criminal shadow state ... is the gum that fouls every good policy and drives all but the toughest reformers to capitulation or mental breakdown'.¹⁷⁴ Measures to transform this culture so far have failed and will continue to fail as long as the priority remains the geo-political capture of Ukraine to reduce Russian influence.

When Poroshenko called on Yatsenyuk to resign and a no-confidence vote was taken in early 2016, a backdoor agreement between the president, 'Yats', Kolomoisky and Akhmetov kept the government in power nevertheless. US pressure was even more decisive. Pyatt told deputies to the Kiev parliament in no uncertain terms they

were gambling on their future, and Joe Biden called Poroshenko in February to tell him Yatsenyuk had to stay on.¹⁷⁵ In light of the continued rise in opinion polls of the Opposition Bloc, the successor of the Party of Regions, the last thing the United States and EU wanted was elections. So when Yatsenyuk, whose People's Front was not expected to pass the 5 per cent threshold, eventually stepped down in April, he was succeeded, without a popular vote, by Volodymyr Groysman of the Poroshenko bloc, then the Speaker of the Kiev parliament. Groysman's remit was to apply the decentralisation provisions of the Minsk agreement and seek a measure of reconciliation with Russia. Whether this also implied a weakening of the war party and a reinforcement of Russian influence remains to be seen. In this respect, Poroshenko's powerful business partner, Konstantin Grigorishin, who lives in Moscow and has been denounced by Yatsenyuk as an 'FSB agent', is a force to be reckoned with.¹⁷⁶

The civil war in Ukraine, according to the 2015 Chatham House report, 'has united Ukrainians as never before. But where divisions remain, they are sharper than they were'. How Russian-Ukrainians and nationalists can still be reconciled is a big question.¹⁷⁷ Indeed the situation in large parts of the country is explosive as I write, as the population reels under the absurdities of an anti-Russian economic policy aggravated by the austerity policy dictated by the West.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the relentless plundering of Ukrainian society continues. When public officials had to declare their assets (as part of a mandatory anti-corruption drive after the IMF threatened to suspend the next instalment of its \$17.5 billion bailout fund for the war-torn country), it turned out they had accumulated vast amounts of cash. Groysman alone had \$1.2 million in notes at home, others had comparable cash holdings, precious metals, and jewellery (some also were found to possess Nazi paraphernalia). Clearly the sustained GDP contraction of 17 per cent following the coup did not affect those running the state.¹⁷⁹

MH17: symbol of a global gamble gone wrong?

This book has argued that the MH17 catastrophe occurred in the context of a deep crisis primarily of the West's making. From the moment the Soviet bloc and the USSR disintegrated, the forces associated with speculative financial asset investment began a predatory expedition into the realm of the former adversary. Covered by NATO and EU expansion, market discipline imposed by capitalist raiders exposed the defunct state-socialist societies to a plunder unprecedented since the Nazi invasion of 1941, this time also at the hands of home-grown predators.

In Russia the forces protesting this rampage were still kicked into line by the state of emergency and fraudulent elections in 1993 and 1996, respectively, but towards the turn of millennium they had become strong enough to propel a new president into power. With Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, the limits placed on oligarchic enrichment and Western direction led to what we have called the third Cold War. Henceforth, NATO and EU enlargement, merging into a single thrust, entered Russia's immediate security zone and began to clash with Moscow's attempt to resurrect a measure of economic and security integration with the now independent former Soviet republics. After pro-Western, anti-Russian 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine and actual NATO and EU membership of the three Baltic republics, the 2008 'war to stop NATO enlargement'

marks the end of East–West compromise. Unleashed by the government of Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, the conflict saw Russia's resistance to the Western advance mutate from verbal warnings to actual military action to protect both its sphere-of-influence and the minorities challenging Georgian sovereignty.

A comparable equation played out in Ukraine in 2013–14, when the armed seizure of power by anti-Russian ultra-nationalists, on the back of mass demonstrations against President Yanukovich's rejection of Ukraine's association with the EU, led to an acute crisis. The refusal by the country's south-eastern half, oriented towards Russia, to accept the coup government's authority became conflated with a military-strategic issue, the control over the crucial naval base of Sebastopol, home to the Russian Black Sea fleet. In combination they led to the secession of Crimea, regime massacres in Odessa and Mariupol, and a civil war in the Donbass.

Both in the run-up to the *coup d'état* and in the civil war, Washington several times overruled the EU, in particular, Germany and France; but also Bulgaria, where a major Russian gas pipeline across the Black Sea had been planned to land. However, on 16 July 2014, the EU no longer followed US economic warfare against Moscow, since Gazprom gas deliveries, whether supplied via the Nord Stream and planned South Stream pipelines, or through Ukraine, are vital to its economic survival. As we know, Putin at that moment was in Brazil, where he signed the charter for the BRICS bank, besides agreeing with Chancellor Merkel to pursue a 'Land for Gas' deal settling the Ukraine crisis. Whether the actual downing of Flight MH17 the next day was an intentional, premeditated act or an accident, whether it involved a jet attack, an anti-aircraft missile, or both, ultimately cannot be established with certainty. However, the effect was to nip the 'Land for Gas' negotiations in the bud and get the EU on board with the US sanctions targeting Russian energy deliveries, enhancing the prospects for US shale LNG deliveries. How a manifestly bellicose NATO command, possibly with an eye to the alliance's upcoming Wales summit, may have colluded with the regime in Kiev, is a matter of speculation. Yet in this case too, the effect was to solidify the anti-'Putin' consensus in the West and deal a blow to the loose contender bloc composed of the Eurasian Union, the BRICS and the SCO. The tragic end of Flight MH17, this book suggests, serves as a prism through which all the distinct strands that had been fused in the event, were refracted. So what next?

Back in the 1980s, when it launched the second Cold War, the Reagan administration intended to destabilise the Soviet bloc and bring about regime change in Moscow.¹⁸⁰ As argued in [Chapter 1](#), this is also the aim of the current, new Cold War. The idea runs through the pages of the Chatham House report cited a few times already and is discussed in detail particularly in the contribution of Andrew Wood. Although Wood concedes that the West cannot have an interest in Russia sliding into complete anarchy, he makes it clear that the Putin presidency must not be protected 'against change, *whether managed or violent*'. Therefore, 'whether Putin was ousted by an internal coup, by illness or by popular unrest ... it would nevertheless be sensible for the West to give further thought to how it might deal with the consequences of regime change in Russia'.

Effective communication with the Russian people and the defence of human values beforehand would be essential for Western credibility ... Planning for the future ought, lastly, to cover the scenarios from changes of leadership within the current structures, to the

*emergence of a group ready to pursue structural reform in some sort of accountable dialogue with the Russian population, to regime collapse.*¹⁸¹

The president of the National Endowment for Democracy, Carl Gershman, in a piece for the *Washington Post* in October 2016, suggested taking the contract killing of the journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, ten years earlier, as a suitable motif for a more sustained anti-Putin campaign.¹⁸²

For such a campaign, George Soros' Open Society Foundation (OSF) can be trusted with elaborating the 'civil society'/colour revolution scenarios and identifying the groups that might be mobilised for their execution. The OSF plan of action for 2014–17, titled *Russia Project Strategy*, identifies Russian intellectuals active in Western academic and opinion networks, the Russian gay movement, and others as potential levers for civil society protest against the conservative bloc in power in Moscow. From the OSF documents hacked by the CyberBerkut collective, Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation emerges as the key beneficiary, and discussion portals and liberal media such as Echo of Moscow radio station, RBK news agency, and the newspaper *Vedomosti*, as the preferred channels to disseminate content.¹⁸³

From this perspective, the Ukrainian crisis must be viewed in combination with the deployment of new US missile batteries on the Russian border; part of a first-strike capability backing up the Western policy of brinkmanship in the former Soviet space. Are we then witnessing the final dénouement of the global gamble of the new Cold War, in which events can only be switched into higher gear or brought under control? As argued in [Chapter 1](#), Western strategy has come a long way from the compromises of the immediate post-war period to their narrowing or abandonment in the second Cold War of the 1980s. By then speculative risk-taking had crowded out worldviews arising from production and the long-term interest in the stability of a capitalist order. Instead, the primacy of money-dealing capital has turned human survival itself into a high-stakes game played out over the heads of the world's peoples for private gain.¹⁸⁴ The West, led by the effectively bankrupt United States, increasingly relies on force to sabotage the formation of any alternative, something its own social formation can no longer bring forth. Even the most promising, potentially revolutionary IT and media developments coming out of Silicon Valley have been mortgaged by a planetary project of communications surveillance to safeguard US imperial positions.¹⁸⁵ Whether the United States and NATO would therefore also be willing to take even greater risks than they are doing now is a prospect too frightening to contemplate.

However, it must be confronted, or the fate of the 298 people on Flight MH17 may become that of humanity at large.

Notes

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